

IN QUEST OF MYSELF

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY



SWAMI VISHUDDHANANDA
SARASWATI

IN QUEST OF MYSELF

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

SWAMI VISUDDHANANDA SARASWATI

*A Translation from the Ōriya version of
“Bholar Atma Smṛuti”*

By

SRI LOKANATH SARAN PANDA

1st Edition : 1985

IN QUEST OF MYSELF

By

SWAMI VISUDHANANDA SARASWATI



English Translation

By

SRI LOKANATH SARAN PANDA



Price Rs. 20/-



Published by :

NIGAMANANDA ASHRAM

Jharbani

P. O. Amalagoda

Dist. : Medinapur, W. B.



Printed at :

UDYOG PRINTERS

Unit - 3, Bhubaneswar 751001

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

In early 1978. I had the opportunity of reading 'Bhclar Atmasmruti', the Oriya Version of the autobiography of Swami Visuddhananda Saraswati. That inspired me to meet him and visit his Ashram. In the following year, both of my wishes were fulfilled; I met him in March, 1979 at Bhubaneswar and a month later attended the annual function of the Ashram at Gadabeta.

On a few occasions, I have met and listened to him describe firsthand in his inimitable style the many facets of his life history; about the helpless and ignominious moments of his childhood; his aspirations and the trials and tribulations he underwent in his long quest for finding peace and spiritual fulfilment. I have observed that age and heat have not diminished his activity or his poised alacrity. He always outstands in his artless kindness, and simple demeanour. His innocent sagacity disarms every person he talks to. He is a unique disciple of the great master Swami Nigamananda Paramahansa Dev. Like his master he aspired, he braved fatigue, insult and danger, in achieving his life's mission in stages from Bhola Chaitanya Brahmachari, to Swami Visuddhananda Saraswati. His life provides a glorious example of *Guru's* grace in action, "*Mookam Karotee Bachalam, Pangum Langhayate Girim*, (even the dumb is granted the power of speech and the lame is enabled to surmount the hill). He confided to me that he was not interested in his studies in his village L. P. School, because he knew that that was not the proper forum for him. His school was somewhere else— at the Khadakusma Ashram in Midnapur District of West Bengal.

The life of Swamijee is not merely a catalogue of the daily strife and struggle or an account of the waning summer and the changing season of the misty mornings or the cold smell of the dark nights at the 'Badahutu' cave where in fact he lived for years. His life is a life of sacrifice, a life dedicated to *Yoga Sadhana* striving to improve the quality of the human being by way of spiritual development. He was brought up by his uncles after he lost his parents while a babe. All his endeavours to style himself as an ordinary creature, a family boss, proved futile. He was destined to lead a life of an ascetic and strive for attaining spiritual composure through *Laya Yoga* and *Bhav Samadhi* (the natural mode of transcending the ego so as to remain in tune with the qualified over-self through concentration on the breathing wave). The Swamijee loved truth as God. He didn't hide even the private, personal matters as is evident from the confessions he makes before Swami Chidananda his primary spiritual preceptor) and his Guru Swami Nigamananda Saraswati. He communicated his aspirations to a child of four, 'Bhandi' (his maternal sister) and was guided by her words to acquire Mother's blessings. He never feigns to be different from what he really is. His thoughts, words and actions were always harmonious. "Truth is not to be discovered in books", he says, "it resides in every human heart as oneself and one has only to realise". Truth according to him is not a mere attribute of self or God, but it is indeed 'That'—"Thou art That".

Formerly, a *Sadhak* and presently a *Sadguru*, Swamijee, therefore, says "Pick out the evil of falsehood; go deep into the source and nip it in the bud. The sensory organs and sense perceptions have to be subjected to our command and the desires have to be sublimated through the performance of, '*Nishkama Karma*' (selfless action). In order to induct me into such (action), Swamijee had given me the task of getting his

autobiography translated from Oriya to English sometime in the month of November, 1979. I began the work in the third week of January, 1980. Before I started, Swamijee had been at my residence and during the course of discussion narrated certain additional facets of his life, some of which have also been incorporated in this book and hence are not to be found in the original Oriya version.

I was one of those humble few, on whom this duty devolved. I have done my utmost to render a faithful reproduction of the original Oriya version into English. I appreciate the efforts of both Dr. C Mishra and Sri A. Mishra, disciples of Swamijee Maharaj, for kindly going through the manuscript and editing it wherever warranted. In fact, the latter had also been the initiator of the proposal to have the translation requisitioned in the first place. I am also thankful to Sri Padma Charan Swain and Sri Dandapani Sahoo for taking immense pains to type-scribe the original manuscript and the press copy of it, respectively. I also wish to compliment Sri Satchidananda Mahapatra (another disciple of Swamijee) and his team who worked tirelessly to print it in about a month's time. All this could be possible due to the blessings of Sri Sri Gurudev.

All the same, there are bound to be some mistakes or omissions in the book. I request the generous readers to take a lenient view and kindly excuse the Translator, the Editors and the Printers.

Bhubaneswar

24th Feb, 1985.

(The fourth day of the bright half of

lunar Falgun—Swamijee's 80th birth day)

L. S. Panda

C O N T E N T S

	Page
Translator's note	i
Dawn of life	1
My curiosity	10
The struggle	24
Waiting for the Guru	34
My initiation	48
Moving adrift	62
Mother's descent	71
The tangle	89
Miracles	98
The transition	111
From darkness to light	123
Other episodes during my stay in the cave	137
The Pilgrim's progress	165
The succession controversy	189
My initiation into Sanyasa	197
A new Ashram was founded	204
Mother of the Blind Son	211
End of the quest	220

The Dawn Of Life

Belonging to the erstwhile district of Manbhum in Bihar State and situated presently in the Purulia district of West Bengal Ladhuduka, my native place, is a village of fairly large size with most of its inhabitants happening to be the brahmins. Surrounded by green paddy fields, and numerous ponds and tanks with crystal clear water, the village is set amidst rich scenic beauty.

I was born in this village on Tuesday the 27th February, 1906 (4th day of the bright half of the month of Phalgun). My father, Lalmohan Gangopadhyaya was an orthodox and pious brahmin. My mother Sharada Sundari Devi dandled four of us—a daughter and three sons. Our sister died even as an infant leaving behind Abanikanta, the eldest of the brothers; Nagendranath, the second and me, Bholanath, the youngest of all

Barely two months after my arrival in this world, my mother breathed her last. As I grew up and did indeed attain spiritual fulfilment later in life, I realised that whether alive or dead, never can be a mother malefic even towards the weakest of her children. In her untimely death my mother seemed to have benefited me more than she could possibly have done had she survived to nurture and bring me up. I cannot claim for sure to have seen my mother's mundane form but as a consequence, I believe, I was granted the privilege of acquiring, in course of time, the Mother consciousness and feeling the presence of 'Her eternal being' within and outside of all that constitute the physical world. The circumstances under which such consciousness condensed in me form the main theme of the story of my life. In relating it

I wish to help such of the other seekers and aspirants who at the moment undergo trials and tribulations like I did, in their quests intended to unfold for themselves and for the world at large, the true and peaceful nature of the human soul.

Soon after mother's demise, my father's plight was miserable. The entire burden of the family fell on him. Having lost his spouse at the midpoint of his life, he started feeling desolate. Most of the time he was perching himself in a corner of the veranda, with failing health, and low spirit, looking at things through tears. Above all, he was terribly worried for me the motherless little stranger. As there was no other woman in the house my father wanted to engage a mid-wife for my up-bringing. The mid-wife did arrive at our house but she hardly attended on me for more than a night. Not only did she quit the next day complaining that my mother's ghost calls on me during night, but she never turned up again despite repeated requests. The news gained wide circulation in the village from soft and silent whispers to mild gossips and open discussions near the ghats of village ponds. This was enough to stir the village and scare the women folk. None was willing to approach our house, leave alone attending on me despite attractive wages offered. I was then left to myself. The agony of my father knew no bounds.

My intermittent shrill cries were piercing into the dead silence of the house, drawing perhaps the attention of Abani, but were only fun to Nagendra who was barely two and half years old. That must have been a constant source of headache to my father who was already on the point of breaking down. Friends in the neighbourhood tried to console him, explaining the transitory nature of the world and that man is after all mortal. But this did not relieve him of his affliction which was not merely for the death of his wife, but largely for me who had been deprived of all motherly care. My father was brooding: 'would this baby survive at all? How

could he be nursed by a man ? Verily, isn't the mother's lap his real shelter ?'

Soon it seemed impossible for my father to look after a two month old, in addition to bringing up my second brother Nagendra. Under the pangs of sorrow and anguish, he confided in my eldest brother saying "Abani, isn't there a limit for forbearance ? It is impossible now to help this baby survive. We will be rid of all worries by leaving him to wither in the mid-day Sun."

True to his words, that very morning he placed me in the open courtyard, and went out of the house to take bath. There was none other than Abani to look after me at home. Sometime later when I started screaming badly and continuously for a long time, my brother tried to feed me with some milk out of pity. After a while I became quiet. While returning from the bathing ghat my father heard from a distance the gradual declining note of my shrill cry and concluded that the zero hour was imminent and that in a few minutes I might breathe my last. On reaching home, he was intentionally looking away from me as if he was trying to wipe out from his mind all the attachment towards me. The house was caught in the grip of death-like silence. My brothers were grimly watching the mood and movements of my father. Neither of the two had attained the age to understand the sunken heart of a widower. The milk feeding had lulled me to sleep in the open court-yard which was like an oven with the dazzling May sun over head. Verily, "Heaven lies above us in our infancy."

Just then a familiar voice was heard at the front door calling, 'Abani' ! My brother Abani followed by the younger Nagendra, reached the door and was pleased to see our maternal Uncle Gadadhar. He entered inside the house and offered his sincere condolences to my father. Both looked awfully sad and were in tears. The merciful eyes of my Uncle fell on me. Apparently, he must have tried to comprehend the situation. Was he visualising

that the scorching rays of the midday sun were getting cold as sandal wood paste by coming in contact with my tender body ? After thinking for a while he told my father, "Dear brother, may I submit a proposal ? What if I take my youngest nephew alongwith me to his aunty ? I do not like to leave the burden entirely on your shoulders, I am sure you will permit me to share it ! " On hearing this my father must have been relieved of his worry to a great extent. What was there to object to ? Isn't the spirit of the late mother inspiring her brother to offer his services for nursing the child ? Otherwise, why should the uncle spontaneously feel pity for the baby ?

The mercifully benign image of my late mother must have flashed in the mind of my uncle for a moment. He was no doubt looking at me from without; yet deep in his heart I had already occupied a little place equivalent to my mother's lap. I was lying still on the earth – yet another form of the mother. In the morning my brother Abani (another name for the Mother Earth) fed me with milk like a mother. Why should not uncle Gadadhar offer me there-after the mother's affection ? The sanskrit equivalent 'Matula' for maternal uncle incidentally also means 'mother like'.

My birth place Ladhuduka is about 40 km away from Manbazar of Purulia. My maternal uncle's village Mahespur is located mid-way between Manbazar and Ladhuduka. Situated on the bank of the river Kansabati it is a small village under Pancha Police Station. My maternal uncles were respectable brahmins. They had also their reputation as the Zamindars of Mahespur. Of my four maternal uncles, Kailash Nath Mishra was the eldest, the second being Banshidhar Mishra and the third Gopal Chandra Mishra. The youngest was Gadadhar Mishra. The untimely death of my mother had been quite a shock to my youngest maternal uncle as well as to the eldest of the aunts, Giribala. Being aware of the untold misery my father had to face in life, their hearts would bewail and eyes filled with tears.

That day, seeing me in the hands of uncle Gadadhar, my widowed aunt Giribala cried out in a voice choked with emotion, "Well done, having brought the child, Gadadhar ! The unfortunate plight of Lalmohan had been distrubing me badly. How could he have kept surviving a milk-fed baby together with a two and odd year old after the death of his wife ? " Aunt Giribala plucked me from her brother-in-law and pressed me onto her bosom. To me then the difference between my mother and my maternal aunt vanished into thin air. The love and attachment which had taken root in the heart of my maternal aunt, I could understand later, was only a faithful replica of love which my mother would have bestowed on me. Needless to mention, being brought up in an environment of spontaneous love and affection of my uncles and aunts, I had seldom any occasion to bemoan the untimely loss of my parents.

During the day time uncle Gadadhar used to lay me asleep on a small bed in the corner of his little shop. The village women folk including housewives, newly weds as well as mothers who visited there for shopping derived immense pleasure seeing me. Some used to dandle and caress me and some others used to feed me from their breast. The aunts afterall were my relations but who these women were ? Their love, affection, service and attachment seemed invaluable. I am indebted to them all for their kindness. As a consequence not merely was I helped to survive but also enabled to experience the bliss of human life. Later in life I recognised the presence of Divine Motherhood in each person, be it man or woman ! This is precisely the account of how the Supreme Mother appears to have arranged for my upbringing with the help of others, as my own mother passed away prematurely.

The brahmins in particular, and members of the other castes in general, used to perform the Upanayan rituals with all sincerity. My father being a chip of the old block, was quite enthusiastic about the performance.

At the age of eleven, my father wanted my thread ceremony performed, for, unless this was done a brahmin lad in those days was not considered fit to receive his formal education, be it scriptural or vocational.

It was decided that the thread ceremony of my second brother, Nagendra and of mine will be held at one time. Accordingly, I had to come to Ladhuduka. The ceremony was performed with all austerity and as per the prevalent custom.

A few days latter, I went back to my uncle's house at Mahespur.

Time, like tide, waits for none. Information reached us one day that my father, brother Nagendra and sister-in-law (Abani's wife) were badly laid down. Hurriedly I proceeded to Ladhuduka. Father, by then was quite old and his end was perhaps drawing near. The responsibility of running the household had devolved on my eldest brother. He was looking after the cultivation of the small patch of our ancestral land and other household matters. After reaching home, I engaged myself in nursing the patients by giving them diet, medicine etc. I was also carrying food to my brother at the farm.

Fairly young and inexperienced as I was, after a while it became very difficult and almost impossible for me to discharge these arduous duties. In life, this was my first confrontation with strife. My adolescent mind became agitated and I reproached myself for keeping good health when all the rest were sickly. I was eager to release myself from that unpleasant responsibility and service. With puerile humility I prayed God for falling sick so as to help rid myself of the burden. True to my prayers and surprisingly enough, within a couple of days, I fell sick and was bedridden.

No sooner did uncle Gadadhar hear that all of us were bedridden, than he visited us and started nursing and attending on us.

Despite his utmost care and untiring efforts, it was not possible to save my father. After struggling for about twenty days he permanently left us in the month of November, 1918. This marked the second tragedy in my life. I was then barely twelve years old. After attending the funeral rites of my father I returned to my maternal uncle's village.

Being Zamindars, my maternal uncles had genuine interest in the estate and they rendered sincere service to the people. For them service to the people was service to God. Their outlook was liberal, generous and kind. Their tanks, mango grove etc. were given on lease on very liberal terms for the benefit of the lessee. For instance, a lessee was required to supply fish weighing no more than 20 to 25 kg towards his lease amount and nothing else. Seventy years ago the price of such fish was not at all high. My uncles had very limited members in their family. The fish was used mainly to be fed to other people, namely guests, visitors etc. My uncle's house was a 'Sevalaya'—a house meant to render service to others. My uncles spared no pains to ensure that I was properly looked after. Along with the other children of my uncle's family I grew up comfortably.

I was naturally leading a care-free life. My path almost ran down with butter and honey. However, as an adolescent, I was perhaps less smart than most others of my age. Goddess of Learning was surely unkind to me. Although I had attained 13 years of age by then, I could not cross the lowest class in the village Lower Primary School. In a Zamindar's family there was no dearth of money or opportunity for education. But the fact was that I had little urge for formal learning. However, my uncle did not give up hopes. He had a desire to see his nephew well educated and established in the society, like the others. With this end in view, he engaged private tutors to coach me at home.

By nature I was rather shy and simple minded. In fact my name itself signified this aspect of my character. I liked to spend most of the time in the company of women-folk at home. Due to premature

death of my parents, my mental strength had perhaps been reduced to some extent and it seemed as if I was longing for my mother amidst all women I met. I attended the school for a period of two to three years and tried to read and write a little, but there was hardly any zeal for it. Slowly I could understand that I was going to the school because my uncle wanted it. If I did not attend the classes, uncle would be sore about it and the teacher would take me to task. I used to forget on reaching home all that I had learnt at the school.

Even at the age of sixteen when I failed in the second standard after appearing in the annual examination, I once told to myself 'How long should this struggle continue? Can I change the decree of my fate?' My classmates got promoted to the next higher class, and on promotion kiddies joined me. In course of about two to three years of schooling I couldn't even correctly spell the compound words. Being ashamed of this and mustering all my courage once, I asked my uncle, 'Havn't I the frailest of memories and isn't it futile to continue trying to acquire school education?' My uncle calmly listened to my rationale and did not utter a word in reply.

One day I was severely beaten by the teacher as I did not do the task. My uncle coming to know of the incident reprimanded the teacher saying "you have failed to help Bhola master the lessons over these years, instead you have dealt him only with blows, Anyone can beat a child but how to properly teach him? There is no need for him to attend school from to-day"! My uncle's change of attitude delighted me. I felt fully relieved of the sickness of education by bidding good-bye to my studies. If anybody would complain of me, my uncle used to question, "Is bookish knowledge indispensable for character building and development of the inner being in man. I will see that Bhola grows up as a man among men in course of time!" Pondering on such comments of my uncle, often I used to wonder, 'My uncle alone knew how he would fulfil his ambitions by banking on a fool like me.'

In the mean time, I lost my third maternal uncle. As is customary, the barely literate widowed aunts wanted someone to read the popular epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata to them. Strangely enough, of all people, I was chosen for this purpose. It took me about a month to complete the reading of the Ramayana. Thereafter, I started reading the Mahabharata. This marked, so to say, the closing ceremony in my life of formal reading. Verily in later life, except for a few chapters of the books of Swami Nigamananda Paramahansa, the Bhagabat Geeta and perhaps the spiritual monthly "The Arya Darpan," I had no inclination for reading anything else.



My Curiosity

In course of time, my uncles and aunts started complaining that although uncle Gadadhar had taken the responsibility of rehabilitating the nephew, i. e., me, was he able to exercise full control on him ? What would be Bhola's occupation in life ? Uncle Gadadhar had to keep patience quite for some time and then on one occasion I heard him admonish the complainants at home, "Look, no one need try to forcibly engage Bhola with ordinary work. Noble deeds await to be accomplished by him in future. Acquisition of property for selfish ends can not be his mission in life."

I was indeed touched by the confidence in his statement. I began to think, 'what afterall could be the noble deeds being alluded to by my uncle ? I did not even have enough education to comprehend or differentiate between noble and ordinary deeds. No where there seemed to be as unworthy a person as I happened to be'. Although I was haunted by this inferiority complex, yet I was clinging up to my belief that one day it would be possible for me to ascertain what constitute life's noblest deeds.

In this material world where everybody remains engaged in some business or the other, how long could I remain idle or unemployed ? With the passage of time, potentially a man of action, I was roused by an urge for activity. The natural stimulus for work turned me almost mad. On attainment of *Yoga Siddhi* later in life, I could realise that a true aspirant's life is initially marked by tremendous drive for work in its multitude of forms, and this is indeed designed to permanently destroy the seeds of all action or attachment.

There is no dearth of activity in this world. All are born with an instinct for work; as such the drive for work is spontaneous. Every being, animate or inanimate, due to an urge from within or without, is engaged in one or the other of a variety of activities. The impulse for self-protection and sensual enjoyment keeps one chained to action. In certain instances, result of good action is not immediately realised but, on the other hand, temporary gains and attractive opportunities may be had even as a result of bad or wrong deeds. Coming face to face with such contradiction in life, the common seeker is perplexed. The apparent gain or loss constitutes enjoyment of the fruits of past *Karma*. With the blessings of the Sadguru, the spiritual Master or guide, one understands that an individual's *Karma* in the forms of '*Samchita*' and '*Prarabdha*' and the binding action of '*Maya*' constitute the cause of this apparent contradiction. Unless the fruits of such action are enjoyed, they continue to remain in store. Bondage could be dissolved only with the divine mercy of *Ma*, the Eternal Mother. Alongside enjoying the fruits of *Prarabdha*, if the devout worshipper fortunately receives Her merciful blessings, then and only then he remains united with the supreme and acts in a detached manner. He then does not get afflicted by the stress and strain of life, rather he remains immersed in peace and bliss despite performing all actions like an ordinary worldly being.

As time passed, my vacant yet restless and inquisitive mind got engaged in studying the trades of the people in the village. Nearby I found the farmer ploughing the land, the weaver active with his shuttle, the smith busy with the hammer on the anvil; but I had none. Education had little appeal to me but there were other things of interest.

While loitering one day my attention was drawn by the sound "Thuk, Thuk, Thuk,": lo, the Santhal weaver was busy on his loom and was weaving adroitly! I was very much

attracted towards it. One day, out of inquisitiveness, I went to his house and examined the hand-loom and its components. I was fascinated by it and wanted to have one myself. There was no dearth of money with my uncles. On the next day, I went to Bankura and purchased a loom and brought it home. Despite a great deal of labour, not before a month could the loom be installed. Having gained experience, I wove clothes and the business gathered momentum. I was no more an idler. Indeed, I soon became an expert in weaving.

My passionate exercise, however, had to be suspended for the time being, because I found myself gripped by the questions, 'What next? Who would enjoy the profit out of the business? Certainly not my uncles: they were not in need of money. But what about my own brothers?' Soon I was warmed up by the sweet memories of my past brief association with them and at once I felt a desire to go to my native village and see them. After obtaining permission from my uncles I went to Ladhuduka, my native place. My brothers were immensely pleased to see me after a long interval. We three brothers started discussing on matters of common interest unmindful of the fleeting time.

Before long, I discovered the deplorable financial condition of the house. After father's demise a loan of about Rs. 2000/- had been incurred and unless seven out of the 20 acres of land were sold it could not be liquidated with the large sum of interest accruing on it. Helpless as he was, my eldest brother almost took a decision to sell the land. However, opposed to the idea of parting with the land, I suggested "why don't both of you brothers go to the town and try to seek some jobs? I will myself take care of the family. In view of the future, selling landed property is not at all a wise step".

My suggestion had the desired effect. My brothers, though not too happily, set out in search of jobs. With good

deal of confidence I bestowed on myself the responsibility of maintaining a bankrupt household where, now, me and the elder sister-in-law lived. At this time I remember clearly to have developed great strength of mind. Although the present assignment was voluntary and doubtlessly self imposed, never was I boastful. On the other hand, I sought God's help with utmost humility. In course of time new faces became familiar, acquaintances deeper, and the good-will with others permitted me to take independent decisions on matters relating to my little world. The shopkeepers supplied me our daily needs on credit. I installed a loom at my house and was happy to re-establish myself in my "original art". I wove a piece of cloth in two days, sold it in the town with a net profit of eight annas (fifty paise). In those days this little income was sufficient to make our both ends meet.

As days rolled by, I developed friendship with the creditors and executed a usufructuary mortgage deed against our land in their favour. The land was redeemed of the charge and was transferred to us after three years. We were happy to be restored to ourselves. The journey of the caravan became easy again.

I sent words to my brothers saying, 'Please come back home and take charge of the property. My work is over and I intend to go back to my uncle's'. Overwhelmed with joy, my brothers were greatly appreciative of my accomplishments and my devotion to duty and at the same time amazed by my sense of sacrifice and nonchalance. Severing all ties of fraternal affection and attachment, I counted my steps back to my maternal uncle's house at Mahespur—a nice beating of retreat.

Having narrated in detail of what had happened at my native place, I meekly submitted to my uncle, "My worldly activities seem to have come to an end. In a short period of time I have gained a wealth of experience even as the defacto

head of our family and in helping to save it from near ruins. What am I to do next?"

I was an affectionate nephew of my uncle. His love for me knew no bounds. Although he had already discovered in me an inborn 'ascetic' and obtained proof for my spontaneous aversion for material gains, he was unable to offer any advice at that moment. Perhaps he was not still quite sure of the exact shape my life would take in the future.

I heard one day that *Kumbha* Mela was being held at Prayag. They used to say :

"A million Sadhus (ascetics) at one sight
Sins of a billion births take to flight."

Pondering over the matter I got excited, The very next moment I decided to go and witness the Mela. If anyone knew my programme of action, I was sure to be prevented from my attempt. I, therefore, left the house without notice. The only provision I had with me for my journey was Rs. 5/-. Reaching Adra Railway Station, when I asked for a ticket to Kumbha Mela, I was given one to Benaras (Kasi). The fare was Rs. 4/- and annas 8 (Rs. 4.50). I was thus left with only eight annas (fifty paise). I heard that Prayag or Allahabad ~~was~~^{is} near Kasi. I got down at Mughal Sarai junction for a change of train to Kasi.

In the train I had picked up acquaintance with a passenger. He was a Bengali and was going to Kasi to see his mother who had been serving there. He was new to the place, so was I. I could mark his lonely, sunken heart and alarmed looks. I consoled him telling that I would help him to reach his mother first and then proceed to my destination.

After getting down at Kasi, we proceeded to his mother's residence in a *Tanga*.

On reaching the house, we were told that his mother had since left the place for her home town. However, the landlord coming to know about us, extended hospitality and allowed us to stay there. We had our bath in the Ganges at the Manikaranika Ghat followed by '*Darshan*' (beholding) of Baba Biswanath at the temple.

I was then rather young, and needless to say, quite new to the place. Not a known face was to be seen. The gloomy thoughts about the succeeding days cast its sorrowful shadow on me. I felt desolate and indeed tears rolled down my eyes. I got badly homesick and planned to return back. Sucking up the tears and choking the feelings of the heart, I approached the landlord. He asked me if I had come on a pilgrimage. I agreed. He then said, "you should never miss the Kumbha Mela". On hearing him, an unusual sensation went up my spine because that indeed had been my original objective. He provided food for the night. I left Kasi the next morning and reached Prayag at about the dusk.

It was a winter night. To me, cold seemed to be extremely severe. While I was fumbling as to where to go and how to protect myself, I was attracted by the way the Sadhus lived with scant clothing under the open sky. Didn't the heap of wood burning before them protect them from the biting cold?

Soon I noticed, a few Sadhus sitting nearby around fire. I joined them and sat in a corner. I observed that devotees came from all over and distributed sweets to the Sadhus, I too received a share being one among them. With a sigh of relief I mumbled to myself, 'Should there be any want in life if one

became a Sadhu ? Without having to exert, plenty of sweets would be available and it would be enjoyable indeed" ?

While walking on the bank of the Ganges early at dawn before taking bath, suddenly I noticed that a strange looking nude woman, apparently insane, chasing at me. I ran for life and got mixed up in the crowd. Was that a scene enacted by the divine Mother to scare and ward me away to go back home as there was no need for me to come to a far away place for receiving spiritual initiation and for performing '*Sadhana*' ?—I tried to convince myself about the significance of this event at a future point of time.

My stay at Prayag for four days was not too bad. However, my desire to get started as a Sadhu did not materialise. I certainly expressed my intention before some of the Sadhus and group leaders to initiate me into their order, but none was willing to take me as a disciple. Desperately, therefore, I had to leave the place taking the return trip to my uncle's home. On seeing me, every body heaved a sigh of relief.

My spontaneous attraction for pilgrimage and desire for the company of Sadhus at an early age had been a cause of anxiety for my uncles. This time, therefore, they planned seriously to tie me down to the material world. Some land was allotted to me and I was asked to look after cultivation. Because my zeal for mundane work and the efficiency of turn-over was as much convincing as my detached outlook, people cheered me up and believed that one day Bholanath will shine as a thorough-going and honest family man.

Almost every house-holder has to carry out some business or the other, however, in my later life it remained to be proved that every devoted and dynamic worker need not stick to household business or take to family life.

My successful achievements in agriculture prompted my uncles to test my ability in salesmanship for yet greater returns. It was therefore, decided to have me engaged in business. According to the new plan, I was kept in full charge of a grocery shop at Delang, a place about two kilometers from Mahespur. There I worked as a shop keeper. For sometime, there was roaring business. The skill of my tradesmanship was praised by one and all.

Mysterious are the ways of destiny. A surprising incident brought my new career to an abrupt end for the rest of my life. One day I learned that a Sadhu named Nandakshepa was performing '*Raas Mela*' (A gathering of devotees) in a nearby village. I was naturally eager to meet the Sadhu and curious about the *Mela*. I reached the *Mela* site at dusk and noticed that the presiding Sadhu was fairly old. People around were talking about his greatness and his "*Siddhis*" (miraculous achievements).

The visitors were offering their respect by prostrating at his feet. When my turn came, I somehow felt myself overtaken by a sense of superiority of being born a brahmin and refrained from bowing before him; yet I kept sitting in a corner. His devotees were busy rendering personal service to him. I was just wondering what caste the Sadhu would belong to and whether would it be desirable for a person born of brahmin lineage to touch his feet or partake of '*Bhoga*' (food) offered to him.

A little while after, I noticed the Sadhu standing beside me and addressing, "Hello young brahmin!, but you have already forsaken your own duties and adopted nonbrahminic occupation; haven't you? Is it the duty of a brahmin to run a shop?" He then left me alone utterly puzzled.

I soon tried to criticize myself, 'it must then have been beyond the pale of the duties of a brahmin to run a shop,' and wondered, 'what should be my duty if I identify myself as a brahmin ?' The next moment I decided not to run the shop, although I was aware that closing down a flourishing shop would doubtless be considered as an act of foolishness. After settling the accounts, I deposited the keys with my uncle. No doubt, I was apprehensive of my uncle getting annoyed with me. But to my great relief, he did not ask me even a question and appeared to be rather indifferent. This incident proved once again my inherent detached attitude towards work !

My uncles next hatched a plan to tie me down with marriage. Time and again the matter was discussed by my aunts and uncles and they were about to find for me a suitable bride. Before supporting the proposal, uncle Gadadhar thought it proper to know my reaction. When asked about it, I remember to have told uncle frankly, "Kindly, refrain yourself from this attempt. Since my childhood, I have been regarding women folk of this and the surrounding villages as my mothers or foster mothers. Over the years I have been having free and unreserved access to their midst. Even now, at the prime of my youth, I am unable to change my attitude towards women--young or old--and do not feel any attraction for them. However, for observance of social customs if I must marry, an adverse consequence is not likely to be ruled out. In view of the experience you gained through attempts to induct me in one or the other trades in the past, may I request you to please abstain from trying to get me married. "

Although coming from seemingly an immature brain, my advice must have made my uncle think, 'Bhola is not talking nonsense. Is it necessary that all those who get married customarily lead a happy married life ? Verily, if a boy like

'Bhola is allowed to act the way he deemed fit, it might turn out to be a blessing for him'. These and other considerations prevented my uncles from making further contemplations about my marriage.

These days, what often bothered my mind was the nature of true duty in life. In the meantime, my uncle had got me engaged in supervising a new house being constructed. I had engaged myself heart and soul with the work. My uncle had strictly prohibited others from giving orders or instructions to me. I was getting the work executed according to my choice and supervising it with utmost sincerity. The construction of the walls was in progress.

One of my maternal cousins, Srustidhar, met me at the work site. Inter alia, he told me that he had taken *Deeksha* from Swami Nigamananda Paramahansa. According to him the Swamijee, also respectfully referred to as Sri Sri Thakur, was a self realised Sadhu, and a *Sadguru* (Spiritual Master), a great scholar and a *Siddha Yogi* (adept in yoga). His principal *Math* styled as the Assam Bangiya Saraswat Math is near Jorahat in Shibsagar District of Assam. He also established several *Ashrams* in different regions of Bengal. Near Calcutta his *Ashram* is located at Halisahar. The one in the western region of Bengal and the nearest to us is at Khadkuma. After these introductory remarks, he asked me, "Bhola, as you are unable to fully involve yourself in any worldly business, won't it be appropriate for persons like you to join such an Ashram? Would you like to work as a cook at the Khadkuma Ashram and serve the Sadhus?"

As I took the offer as a personal insult to me, I immediately rebuffed, "Srustidhar, send your Thakur here. I may

appoint him as a cook." This insolent remark of mine made him quit the place at once. For a while thereafter, we were not in talking terms.

One day, just by chance, the labourers did not turn up for work. By fits of whim I thought, 'couldn't I myself carry out the work? What if the labourers were absent for a day. Let me just try'. I hurried home and after eating some "*Mudhi*" (puffed rice) for my breakfast, I got engaged in the work all by myself. It was *Phalgun* (February-March); the sun was up getting hotter and hotter. Having worked out of frantic zeal at a stretch from half past eight in the morning to nearly one in the afternoon, I got awfully exhausted and sat down under shade. Questions soon popping up in my mind comprised 'What am I doing? For whom is all this labour? If I die to-day, who will stay in this house? Man is after all mortal and I am going to die one day! Why then am I constructing the house?'

Lack of habit for hard physical work, the hot sun and my empty stomach were all conducive not only for fatigue and head reeling, my mind itself appeared, under these circumstances, to pass through an anticlimax and, so to say, was on a backgear. Never before was I shaken up by strange questions as these. In fact, hard work I did perform in the past with admirable patience and efficiency. However, the feeling of debility after a self imposed four hour long physical labour was altogether a new experience' which I had to reckon with.

Trying to determine the usefulness and the duties of my life, was I on the verge of mental derangement? The inner debate seemed to continue. 'What afterall should be my duty? Who is there to guide me and lead me to my goal? What is that duty or work which is permanent in value and

brings fulfilment in life? Would life then end by performing just any kind of work instinctively intended for running the machine this body infact is! Why build a house if I do die one day?' This original question haunted me like a devil.

While I was in this dilemma, relatives came to invite me for taking bath and lunch. Absentmindedly I replied, 'What use taking food or bath? For how long is this life?' Whosoever came to me at that moment got the very same reply. My appetite appeared to have fled and I was almost out of control.

Informed about this state of affairs uncle Gadadhar came to me and asked "What has happened to you?" Looking blank, I replied, "If I die tomorrow, what will happen to this house. Why did you then ask me to build the house in the first place? Is this the right kind of duty in life?"

Calmly my uncle said, "All right, get up, let us go home. There is no more need of it." Pulling me up he took me with him and helped me to bathe. Food was served, but I was not yet willing to take it. My relatives began to pity, murmuring, "Ah! the boy finally went mad. May we not help him by proper treatment!" Arrangements were made to attend on me and provide service to me punctually and meticulously. Despite all the care and caution observed, the 'sickness' could not be arrested. I was laid down with the delusion for a period of four days without food or drink.

On the fourth day, I was reminded of Srustidhar's talk about the Sadhus and the Ashram few days back. I got curious to find out how his Guru Nigamananda Paramahansa became a *Thakura* (God like holy man). Impulsively, I decided to visit the

Ashram, study how the Sadhus live there and the duties they perform. The next moment I went to Srustidhar and conveyed my reaction to him and implored, "Brother, let us go and visit your Ashram once".

The fear of denial of permission to visit the Ashram made us leave the house secretly at night in two different directions, with an understanding to meet at Sirjam railway station. I reached the station first. After talking to the Station Master I could learn that he himself was a disciple of Swami Nigamananda Paramahansa. My intentions no longer remained a secret to him. He took me inside his house and introduced me to a Sadhu (Srimat Satish Brahmachari, later known as Brahmananda Saraswati). I saw him lying on a bed; but I did not offer my *Pranams* (salutation by touching the feet) to him. When asked, I disclosed my name, address, and my native place.

At this time, I was smoking bidi. Getting a scent of my habit the Sadhujee cautioned me, "Look, smoking is prohibited in the Ashram, and you may not be permitted to stay there". Hearing this I was very much worried. Inquisitively, I asked, "Nobody does smoke Bidi in the Ashram?" The Sadhujee didactically replied, "The use of intoxicants is totally banned and the addicts have no place there". The next moment I started imagining that I would have to give up bidi smoking, if I stayed at the Ashram. I then implored to him, "May I get a puff of *Tamakhu* (a tobacco preparation) from the Hooka for the last time before you"?

Permitting me the Sadhujee said, "You may smoke here as much as you can, but not inside the Ashram."

I took the Hooka and filled it up with some tobacco lying nearby. I lighted it and sucked it up with such a vigour that the fire grew into a flame, This was the last puff of tobacco I had with a satisfaction, never to resume again in life. Next moment, I surrendered my bundle of bidi and the match box before the Sadhu and took an oath not to smoke bidi again. My strong inner desire to explore to live with the Sadhus in the Ashram was evident from this casual incident. Srustidhar by then had arrived. We took the morning train for Gadabeta. Khadkuma Ashram is located about fourteen kilometres away from there. We covered the distance by foot and reached the Ashram. This occurred during February, 1930. I was then twentyfour years old.

●

The Struggle

As Srustidhar and I walked along the country road and approached the Khadkusma Ashram set amidst a beautiful garden of tall green trees laden with fruits and flowers and surrounded by dense natural Sal forest not very far from its outskirts, the overall setting of the Ashram was a feast to my eyes. I felt a throb of unusual pleasure in the core of my heart.

I met Swami Chidananda Saraswati Maharaj, the Head of the Ashram. He recieved the two of us most cordially. Soon we got started with informal chat. Introducing me, Srusti-dhara told about the early demise of my parents and my detached outlook. Having listened carefully to the details, the Swamiji suggested, "you would then better renounce the world and become a *Babaji* (Renunciate) and reside here". I promptly replied, "Maharaj, why should I become a Babaji ? Although I have lost my parents, I have my brothers, uncles, aunts and other near and dear relatives to live with".

By nature, I was not in the habit of speaking lies or making false promises even if it pleased some one. To me truth was God. I therefore, did not right away pronounced to become a Sadhu. Moreover my primary intention of visiting the Ashram was to observe the activities of the Sadhus and their attitude to life. My hesitation for joining as a Sadhu prompted him to ask. "Why don't you then work as a cook in the Ashram ? We have presently the need for a brahmin youth for that job. In case you agree, what salary would you like to have ?"

"Sir, I am prepared to work for sure, but I do not know much of cooking. However, you may fix up my salary considering the magnitude and labour or responsibility required of me," I replied.

I hardly need repeat that I did not disclose, on my first interview with the Head of the Ashram, the real purpose of my visit to the place. However, in course of time I did get the opportunity for knowing if he had indeed probed, in our very first meeting, into my mind in order to appreciate the deep seated "*Vairagya*" (spirit of renunciation) in me. With the permission of the Maharaj, I was appointed In the Ashram as a cook.

My inquisitive eyes were closely observing the activities and the conduct of the Ashramites, especially the *Brahmacharis* (primary renunciates) and, of course, of Chidanandajee, the Head. while I took about 3 to 4 days to pick up cooking of the usual items of food served in the Ashram. I continued to achieve proficiency in my work and merrily passed the days. My love for and devotion to work made me the blue boy of the Ashram. The Maharaj was very much pleased with my work and dearly loved me.

It would be fairly amusing if I note that at this time I was consuming food squarely proportionate to the extent of physical labour I was putting in. I was almost a glutton. My appetite did not quench before I ate rice cooked from nearly 1.5 kg. of grain. I was habituated to eat a lot even in my uncle's house where food was plentiful. The strength I gained by assimilating a variety of rich food was creditably utilised in carrying out many different items of work—irrespective of its nature, quality or the strain.

Nearly three months rolled by. I had been having no other engagement than cooking and eating food. *Sadhana* (spiritual practice) or *Bhajan* (prayer), which I did observe some of the Sadhus perform early in the morning and again at dusk, did not yet have much appeal for me. However, I did surely imbibe some faith on account of the responsibility vested in me to serve the Sadhus in sincerely preparing food for them. In other words, I had already come to respect the Head of the Ashram and the other inmates who seemed to happily live and work in this world yet not belong to it or get entangled in it.

One day at about 1 in the afternoon, Chidananda Maharaj set out to uproot the stumps of a felled tree. It was customary at the Ashram that until the Head and the senior Sadhus had taken food (Prasada), the juniors could not eat. And I being the cook, my turn usually came the last. As it was getting very late, I was already feeling very hungry.

I went near the Maharaj and politely requested him, "Sir, kindly do have your bath now, while I take care of the stumps."

"Could you do it?" he asked me.

"Yes", I answered with trifle confidence. He then proceeded to take his bath.

Pulling up all my strength I somehow could lift one up. It was about 2.30 p.m. and with empty stomach I got completely exhausted and had to sit down on the spot.

Looking back I, however, noticed that instead of taking bath, Maharaj got himself engaged in checking up some accounts inside the Ashram.

Not yet fully devoted to or convinced of the merit of Ashram life, my severely hungry stomach caught me in a frenzy. I thought 'if God's blessings would be had by uprooting stumps, then, I had plenty in my own uncles' gardens. What was the necessity of staying in the Ashram and court such difficulty. It *is* much better to return home'.

Continuing I myself, queried "What type of Sadhus are these ?"

'They seem to be utterly merciless and cruel ; Any other place is preferable to this one inhabited by these gangsters,' I sort of concluded.

These thoughts drove me at once to the determination of leaving the Ashram. However, soon it was to be proved that all my above thoughts had not been a broadcasting before the deaf heavens !

Just then the Maharaj shouted "Bhola, you need no more remove the stumps. Take your bath and come at once".

After having a quick wash I appeared before him.

Without the least sign of disturbance on his face he beamed at me and enquired, "What is the train fare for going back home ?" Continuing he observed, "Look, do not attempt to quit without taking your legitimate salary and the train fare. You come from a respectable family and if you travel without a ticket, you may face imprisonment. However, no longer can you stay at the Ashram."

The earth under my legs appeared to slip while I was listening to the Maharaj. "How could the Maharaj, I asked myself, know of what I was thinking.' The Maharaj must have

some supernatural powers. How can anything be achieved in life leaving his company. With these considerations, I repeatedly begged excuse of him. He was however, not prepared to listen to me.

I again begged of him saying, "Maharaj, I surely admit of my fault. Kindly excuse me this time. I promise such lapses would not recur. Induct me into Brahmacharya and keep me with yourself. I shall never go back home."

He then admonished me saying "Bhola, it is extremely difficult to become a Sadhu. To become one, you have to turn yourself a living corpse. Could you invite death joyously?"

I once again implored, "Maharaj, I will work according to your dictate. I totally surrender myself at your feet, I have left my home and come here verily to become a Sadhu. There is none to shed tears at my death, and hence permit me to stay here and kindly train me up."

Pleased with my humility, Chidananda Maharaj permitted me to live in the Ashram as a Sevak or worker. Behind his flickerless eyes, he possibly was trying to visualise my future course of life as an ascetic. With this, my joy knew no bounds. I always remained busy with Sri Sri Thakur's work. My zeal for work grew to its zenith. I was at times working for more than 20 hours a day. According to rules, unlike householders, the renunciates in the Ashram used to get up at 4 in the early morning and remain busy till midnight in performing different items of work. Only half an hour rest was permitted at mid-day after lunch. Sleeping during the day time was strictly prohibited. Goddess of sleep could not normally dare approach me. However, she did at times overpower me despite my efforts to maintain vigil.



Swami Chidananda

While this struggle was going on, one evening at '*Arati*' (the act of revolving burning wicks all round the Deity in a vertical plane) time I fell down on the floor of the *Natmandir* with a big jerk. I received head injuries and there was some bleeding. When asked by Maharaj, I said that nothing serious had occurred, I just could not check the contact of sleep while performing *Keertan* (chanting). 'Strangely enough, these days' I further explained to Maharaj, 'I go to sleep even while standing and walking--my eye lids voluntarily close upon themselves'.

My confession was amusing to those present on the spot as they burst into a laughter. However, from then onwards the Maharaj lessened my workload. I was kept only in charge of the daily worship at the shrine of Sri Sri Thakur as usual. Besides performing this routine twice a day, I attended on the Maharaj and carried out his orders whenever needed. I believe that work experience gained through voluntary service at this time would have served as the foundation of my subsequent steady efforts in *Yoga Sadhana*.

Noticing my excessive desire for consuming food, Chidananda Maharaj once remarked, "Bhola, the sense organs need to be kept under control, if one wanted to become a Sadhu. For attaining self realisation through Yoga Sadhana, the practice of '*Yama*', '*Niyama*' and taking right kind and amount of food is the first step. Truthfulness, non-violence, uncovetousness, Brahmacharya (celibacy) and nongreed are the five components of '*Yama*'. Cleanliness, contentment, formal meditation, habitual reading of spiritual texts and love for God through formal worship constitute '*Niyam*'. These two basic steps are indispensable for an aspirant who otherwise

cannot diligently serve (all creatures) and continue to make progress in the higher levels of Yoga Sadhana until he attains self-realisation.

Every now and then the Maharaj used to give me guidance. I was also getting deeply impressed by his sacrifice, his sense of duty, endurance and above all his kindness and keen interest for my spiritual development.

However, I was naively anticipating to attain spiritual enlightenment as if by leaps within a short period of time. Thus on a fine morning, I decided to reduce the quantity of food I used to eat and I started consuming very little for a while for quick progress in Sadhana. As a result, I became so weak that it was impossible for me to work ceaselessly as was my habit in the past.

To correct my mistaken notion, the Maharaj once remarked "Bhola, you can never attain '*Yoga Sidhi*' (fulfilment) at a quick pace by oppressing your body or mind. On the contrary, it might bring about adverse effects. It has got to be practised slowly but steadily. Moderate habits in regard to food and work are desirable. Excessive labour or fatigue must be avoided. Mindful of his advice, I gradually reduced my quota of food and to overcome the discomfort of hunger, at times, I had to drink small amounts of water. With practice I could experience a gradual decline in my attachment for food. Although I began to take much less food compared with what I had been eating in the past, I was no more feeling weak or exhausted despite hard work. By and by I could conquer many of my past bad habits including of course the afternoon nap.

During this period, driven as if by an impulse, I was vigorously performing all sorts of work day and night besides

attending to personal calls of Chidananda Maharaj and other senior Sadhus, feeling little physical or mental weariness. At times I used to wonder 'how, on earth, is it possible to know what kind of action did one perform in his past life or lives ! Won't it indeed be a blessing if one's entire life is spent voluntarily serving the Sadhus and even the humanity at large when given an opportunity in the present life' ? Having developed such an attitude, I never had occasion to feel discouraged even for a day. On the contrary, my zeal for work was on the increase as I had already attained equipoise through steady and continuous practice. In this way about eight months passed by and, to me, it felt like only eight days.

One day Maharaj sent for me and asked, "Bhola, find some time to go home and formally meet your relatives for the last time and come back." I was overtaken by pleasant surprise, 'it was indeed gratifying that Maharaj would have me as a permanent inmate of the *Ashram*, if I did not choose otherwise and also if my relatives permitted me to become a renunciate. He paid me fare, to and fro, and gave me his blessings.

I travelled by Purulia bus and reached Balakadihi. While negotiating the distance to Maheshpur by a forest road, accidentally, I met uncle Gadadhar. I was then wearing a yellow robe befitting of a Brahmachari. We stood in silence for ten to fifteen minutes under a tree looking at each other. My eyes met his. I was overwhelmed by thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

Keeping in tune with my desire to become a *Sadhu*, my uncle advised me, "My lad ! you must keep up the dignity of the path you have selected for yourself as a steady and determined traveller in your life's journey that is indeed beset

with many hurdles and provocations. May God help you find peace, for yourself and for mankind in general ! I brought you up from childhood and wished to make you a man among men. I am happy to see you intend and try to become a perfect man ! Go home, I shall meet when I return in the afternoon and discuss with you again."

I proceeded towards Mahespur. My dress, appearance and above all my behaviour seemed strange to every one associated with my past life. The unexpected sight fascinated them a lot. As I was wearing the yellow robe, I was addressed as '*Sadhu Baba*'. I went to my uncle's house. My relatives came and saw me. I reciprocated and chatted with them as was expected of a *Sadhu*. Special arrangements were made for my fooding and lodging. I cooked the food myself.

Uncle reached home in the afternoon. He asked about my experiences at the *Ashram*. I explained to him in detail the life and duties of an Ashramite, the routine course of *Sadhana*, *Bhajan*, *Pooja* and *Seva* (service) including my own responsibility to cook food. He was immensely pleased to learn all about me. After staying there for four to five days, I set out for my native village.

At my village, Ladhuduka many brahmin pandits met and siezed me with a volley of questions, With God's grace I could satisfy them with suitable replies. However, one of the pandits came forward and catching hold of my hands, started quoting from the *Purans* (mythology) and scriptures. He argued that the prescribed goals or fulfilments (*purushartha*) of human life could be attained even by leading a worldly-life. Where was then the necessity of giving it up and turn an ascetic ?. Unable to give a prompt reply, I pondered for a moment and prayed Sri Sri Thakur. In a flash, as if, I

said "Sir, would you kindly reply first to a little question of mine ?" When he consented, I asked him "Due to the blessings of God, and the results of your past *Karma* it appears that at the moment you are not in want. You may have attained the required success and fulfilments in life. With all this, viz., wealth, honour, prosperity, fame and learning have you been living in absolute peace ? How many fortunate parents are there like you ? I am running here and there only for peace. If you could show me the path to attain peace and not merely prosperity, I shall stay only with you and shall not go else where.

"The old man then appeared to be in a fix. Breaking the silence after few moments, he released my hands and said "No sir, except peace, I have obtained everything else in life. I have not been able to attain peace and there possibly is little hope of attaining it. The path you tread is perhaps the best ! Go ahead and no one will stop you now."

My brothers were present when this discussion was going on. They studied my mind, and did not dare obstruct me further. They said, "Bhola, even though you will lead the life of an ascetic give us the opportunity to meet you now and then. Do not forget us." Tears and entreaties availed me nothing. I took leave of them by putting an end to my worldly life and the ties of attachment for all time to come. I returned to the *Ashram* and plunged myself in the routine as usual. Two years thus rolled by.



Waiting for the Guru

During December, 1932, the Khadkuma Ashram had suddenly become a centre of vigorous activity with large scale arrangements being made for the Bhakta Sammilani (Annual conference of devotees) convened to be held in its premises. This conference, so kindly and wisely instituted by Sri Sri Thakur Nigamananda Paramahansa Dev, continues till to-day to provide a common platform for his *Grihi* (household) and the *Sanyasi* disciples and devotees to meet annually in order to share spiritual experiences and derive inspiration for performing the duties enjoined upon them. The conference is also intended for expounding to the people the tenets of moral and spiritual education and thereby help consolidate the ethical and *Dharmic* (righteous) basis of life in the society. The need for organising '*Sangha*' (spiritual prayer groups) is stressed and the benefits, both material and spiritual, of model family life are high-lighted. Some time is also devoted for "*Andanaa Sabha*" a session to enact short skits and plays in the stage in order to communicate the moral and spiritual benefits of Dharmic life.

Although I had heard much about the conference, I did not get the opportunity of attending any one of them in the past. The conference sessions were being presided by Sri Sri Thakur himself. I had not met Sri Sri Thakur till that time and I thought the conference would provide me with that opportunity. My eagerness of meeting Sri Sri Thakur inspired me to discharge my duties with added vigour. Devotees and disciples, men, women, young, old, rich and poor poured in from far and near prepared to live for three nights in temporary bamboo and straw sheds not minding the severe cold. The conference

pendal was humming with devotional songs and the atmosphere was surcharged by a spiritual fervor. Just then we were informed that Sri Sri Thakur, the revered Guru Dev, had gone out of Bengal and would not be able to attend the conference. One of his disciples, Srimat Śwami Prajnananda Saraswati Maharaj, would preside over the sessions as his representative. My desire of meeting the great Gurujee had to remain unfulfilled and I had to wait for another opportunity.

However, I could not help musing, when the conference sessions were going on, that although two years had slipped by, the beloved Sadguru Maharaj did not yet visit the Ashram. I had been eagerly waiting until the conference to commence so that he would arrive here to bless me alongwith many others waiting to meet and greet him. The sentimental attachment grown in me, having worshipped his truly adorable image on the shrine and having cherished the lofty ideals propounded by him, intensified the sense of my disappointment. "Could there be a greater misfortune?" I thought I was continued to be haunted by the feeling of disappointment and the uncertainty of a future meeting. I felt sad and sullen. At the same time, the congregation of thousands of devotees in the conference, the mass prayers and meetings helped me to visualise his glorious stature, his grace, and the radiance of his personality as described by those who had met him—the Attainer of '*Nirvikalpa Samadhi*' (a state of trance unconditioned by individual will), indeed a rare attainment according to adepts! The gratitude and esteem which I even impersonally bore towards him, the total self surrender which I cherished because of my unstinted indulgence in his teachings made my longing to feast my eyes by meeting and beholding him grow even deeper.

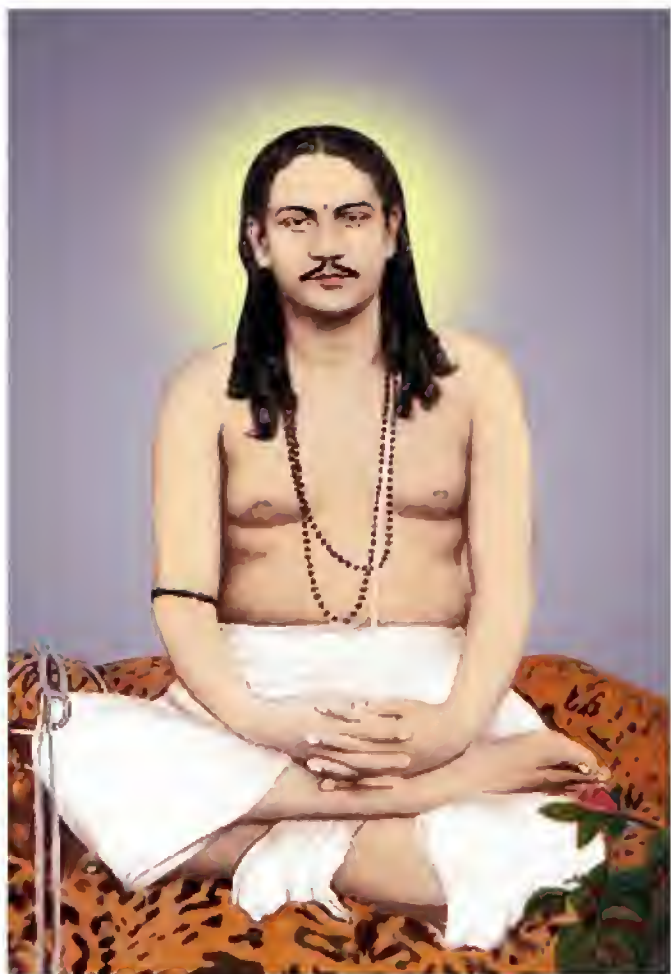
At last the heavens had carried the tidings and conveyed my mental agony to him! information was received at the

Ashram that Sri Sri Thakur would leave Calcutta for Puri in the month of March, 1933 and the Ashramites might meet him in the Express Train at Kharagpur. I was glad to learn that Satish and Priyabrat Brahmachari would be allowed to go and see him. Pure ghee and good quality potato were arranged to be presented to Sri Sri Thakur. I expressed my desire before Chidananda Maharaj, the Chief of the Ashram to go to Kharagpur. However, my request was not granted by him. Being helpless, I suggested the Deputy Chief Sri Chandi Chaitanya Brahmachari, to entrust me with the duty of collection of alms from Kontaigarh, area, so that I could meet Sri Sri Thakur at Kharagpur railway Station on my way.

Chandi'da (Sri Chandi Chaitanya Brahmachari) pleaded for my cause and obtained permission from Sri, Chidananda Maharaj. I rejoiced in anticipation of meeting Sri Sri Thakur and bowing down at his lotus feet. Rama'da of Phatesingpur, another disciple of Sri Sri Thakur, boarded the train along with us at Garbeta. Reaching Kharagpur, we had to wait for the Puri Express Train to arrive. The train approaching, I was on my toes. Tears were filling in my zealous eyes. At last we met Sri Sri Thakur in a first class compartment and one after the other, bowed our heads at his lotus feet.

I felt magnetically drawn towards him. Never before had I seen such a radiant human figure : I was truly overwhelmed. The stature of his personality was well beyond my imagination. Satish, Priyabrat and Rama'da chatted with Sri Sri Thakur for a while. The Guard blew the whistle and we offered our parting respectful obeisances. I distinctly recollect that Sri Sri Thakur did not enquire about my whereabouts. I did not feel displeased either. However, Satish Brahmachari had noticed Sri Sri Thakur casting merciful glances at me again and again during that short period.

I reached Narayangarh railway station the same night by the next available train. To spend the remaining hours till



Srimat Swami Nigamananda Saraswati Paramahansa Dev

the dawn I tried to get some sleep on the platform itself. While still in a subconscious state, I perceived Sri Sri Thakur standing near me. I bowed at his feet. However, he appeared to chastise me with a cane. I caught hold of his feet and started to cry. Soon afterwards assuming his normal benign form, he embraced me and said "Dear child, you have been able to pass the test. At the right time I shall see you again", With these words, he disappeared. I was awakened to notice that the eastern horizon was crimson and the sun was about to rise. This dream of mine at the *Brahma Muhurta* (pre-dawn hour) did indeed come true.

There after I set my journey on foot. Having reached Kotaigarh Village, I went to Sri Tarapad Chakravarti's house. I delivered to him the letter from Chandi'da. He was extremely happy to get it. He took me with him to several devotees and helped in the collection of alms for the *Ashram*.

I left Kotaigarh and reached Dasgram village by dusk. I went to Sri Rajendranath Maity, our co-disciple's house and found him suffering from high fever. I gathered that the police used to prosecute the villagers for illegal 'collection of salt' from the sea. Afraid of the police, the villagers deserted their houses at night. On that night, I remained alone in Sri Maity's house. Incidentally the police did not visit the village. The next morning the villagers returned home. After an early lunch, I started on foot to the Sharisha village where I spent one night and returned to Kotaigarh the next morning. I was not accustomed to move walking from place to place any time earlier. Due to change of weather, irregularity in food and sleep I was soon apprehensive of my health breaking down.

Almost within a couple of days I was badly laid down with Malarial fever. After about a week, I had to return to the *Ashram* in a sickly state. The fever had attacked me in

such an inauspicious moment that it continued to parasitise for about a period of two and half years, much to the detriment of my well being. In spite of all the available treatment, I couldn't recoup my original health. I felt weaker day by day. The gradual decline of health brought the worst of uneasiness because I had to increasingly depend on others. Instead of being able to serve others, I myself needed their service. Eventually, some of the inmates suggested me to quit the *Ashram* and go back home. Reacting I said, "Instead of returning home, I better die here so that you may throw my dead body in the jungle".

One day I approached Chidananda Maharaj and told him, "Sir, I want to take rest. Kindly send me to a solitary place." There was some land with a rest shed belonging to the *Ashram* at Amanpur. The Maharaj kindly permitted me to go and stay there. A cow was kept at my disposal. She yielded one seer (nearly a litre) of milk a day. My capacity to digest food was at the lowest ebb; and 1/8th seer of rice was more than enough for the entire day.

Just about fifteen days later, I suddenly woke up at night, and was haunted by a desire to eat some *jaggery gur*. I weighed the idea and thought that since I was not even able to digest boiled food, eating raw gur might cause more damage than good. However, I could not resist the temptation. The next day, around 4 pm, most hesitatingly I arranged to bring about a seer of Gur and kept very close to me. I was not being able to take a decision till it was about ten in the night. The temptation was on the increase and, lo, involuntarily I started eating the stuff, and by smaller doses finished the stock. Thereafter, I thought I would undoubtedly be grabbed by the icy hands of death ! Life seemed to have slowed down again; but there perhaps is an unknown hand

that shapes our ends. By mid-night I felt as if my belly was bulging with increasing gas pressure. None was beside me. The consequence was anybody's guess. I felt an urge to attend the call of nature, but suddenly with a gush, the entire amount of gas escaped from the belly. Surprisingly enough, then onwards I gradually regained my health and the original digestive power was restored.

As it was in the previous occasion, I was drawn once again by an impulse to eat fish. Being a Brahmachari myself, I felt most uncomfortable in entertaining such an idea. Despite trying hard, I could not check my desire either. At about 4 pm the next day I met with a fisherman carrying a fish weighing about $3/4$ of a seer. I was instinctively drawn towards the fish and was forced to disclose my desire to the fisherman. The fisherman responded to my entreaties and gladly presented the fish to me. Banishing all the hesitation from my puritarian mind I dressed the fish, cooked it and ate the nonvegetarian food. Subsequently I had little repentance, however, because my health continued to improve as if on account of the fish having worked as an elixir. After about ten to fifteen days I completely recovered myself and went back to the *Ashram*. Some remorse was still lingering in my mind for having taken fish, but I heaved a sigh of relief and was cheered up, when Chidananda Maharaj did not particularly disapprove of my action after hearing the full account of what had happened.

Sometime later, Maharaj asked me and Bhagaban Brahmachari to go to Manbhum District for raising funds. Both of us started in our errand with great enthusiasm. We became guests of Kali Babu, the Sub-Divisional Magistrate. This gentleman was cordial and most hospitable. He told us that we might stay at his residence for any length of time and collect alms from the people. Due to the blessings of

Sri Sri Thakur we were turned away by none, whomsoever we approached, donated heartily according to his mite. Being encouraged, we continued to engage ourselves in the collection work. After finishing the job in the town, we concentrated our attention on big and small villages. In due course, we came to my maternal uncle's house. The villagers arranged a meeting and were greatly pleased to listen to our discourses. Sufficient funds were collected from this village. From there we proceeded to Gopalnagar. It was a big village inhabited predominantly by the brahmins. The zamindar of the village invited us to stay in their house.

On the third day of our visit to the village, we were invited along with the other brahmins to attend a Sraddha ceremony. We started to discuss between the two of us so as to determine the way we as Sadhus should behave with the brahmins and uphold the ideals of asceticism. After a little planning, it was agreed that Bhagaban Brahmachari would sit in deep meditation and I would display the spiritual books written by Sri Sri Thakur in order to influence and attract the brahmins who were to visit the next morning for the function. In case anybody wanted to discuss about something it was decided that he would be instructed to come back when Bhagabanjee concluded his trance, as I myself did not then have the adequate learning to advise any one on spiritual matters. On the next day it was arranged accordingly. I just acted as a receptionist. By about 10 am. the brahmins started arriving and their number swelled to about four hundred. Bhagaban Brahmachari remained like a statue with eyes shut from early morning hours untill early afternoon. The brahmins were greatly impressed indeed and instead of volleying silly questions and sarcastic comments, (as is normally done to mock at or humiliate the ordinary mendicants) they started admiring us and in general commented. "The meditating monk appears to be a great *Yogi* and doubtless

a *Brahmajnani*” (one who has the knowledge of *Brahma*). “They took leave of us with a promise to come back after lunch. Meanwhile our food had been served and we went round the community of brahmins being fed in rows. Many of the brahmins met us a little while after and requested us to visit their villages. We collected some donations from those and other nearby villages. Our conduct did prove to enhance the prestige and brighten the image of asceticism among the brahmins and the other villagers.

Our wanderings engaged us from the sunrise to the sunset. While moving from village to village, we arrived at the house of Sri Devilal of Luyagarha. We were well looked after there, with untainted devotion and respect. Here an interesting incident occurred. Chapatis out of rice flour were prepared for our dinner. Those were fairly small in size and also extremely thin. It was not possible to get oneself satisfied unless a large number of these were consumed. To avoid embarrassment Bhagaban Brahmachari ate fewer chapatis than he actually needed. However, I consumed as many as required to satisfy myself. Bhagabanjee could not sleep a wink all night. Unable to suppress his appetite any longer, at about midnight he had to help himself with some ‘*Chura*’ (Pressed rice), we carried with us. The next morning we were provided with good quality rice, dal (pulse), green vegetables, cow’s ghee, etc. We too had some good ghee with us. Food was cooked. Devilal came to personally supervise and arranged for serving the food to us. At our request, he also dined with us and carried some *prasad* (food) to his house. As desired by his family members, we met in a *Satsang* session in their house in the evening and discoursed on the life and teachings of Sri Sri Thakur. Each one of them was immensely pleased to listen to us.

In our drive for collection of funds, we touched many villages in Manbhum District including Manbazar, Bagda. Huda,

Lakshmanpur and my birth place Ladhuduka. My own relations and the others who knew me were pleased to find me in their company once again. With quite a good sum of collected donations we returned to the Ashram after about a month. The Maharaj was very happy to learn about our experience in minutest details and praised us for our creditable achievements. We were also very warmly received by the other Ashramites.

The job of collecting funds from Ananda Nagar Sangha was once entrusted to me. Along with it I collected rice from Sauntia, Mohanpur, Baghasti and other villages. I reached the Station to despatch the rice by train and due, perhaps, to my inadvertance I lost Rs 30/- through pick pocketing. With a restless mind I returned to the Ashram. In those days Rs.30/- was quite a good amount. Despite these lapses, Maharaj appreciated my work because through my ceaseless errands and efforts rice collection could be successfully accomplished. I had no rest at any time at the Ashram. Although now and then I felt depressed on account of a rough tongue of the superiors, a rigid administration at the top had been indeed helping me develop restraint and patience, the two desirable traits in the path of *Yoga Sadhana*.

No doubt, at times there were some misunderstandings among the Ashramites and the Brahmacharis, but these internal differences were being equitably sorted out by the Maharaj. My mental and physical alertness was continually growing as a result of ungrudging performance of the indoor and outdoor duties entrusted to me. This was perhaps drawing me quicker and closer to the moment when Sri Sri Thakur considered me fit to receive spiritual instructions and *Brahmacharya Deeksha*.

At the Khadakusma *Ashram* Chidanandajee was my true guardian and preceptor. Once on the eve of a lunar eclipse, Maharaj was urgently required to go to Calcutta to attend to some important work. He got up very early in the morning and having finished his prayers sent for all of us and said, "The eclipse will start at midnight and would continue till 4 early in the morning. All of you should perform *Namakeertan* during that period". He specifically told me to conduct the programme and I meekly gave my consent. In a bullock cart he left for the station. The labourious long day dragged to its close and slowly the peaceful but eventful night was setting in.

I arranged for the *Keertan* at the *Natmandir* and near the shrine, inside the *Pooja* room, performed *Arati*.

By about 8 pm I suggested that we might start the *Keertan* non-stop and it was gladly agreed to by all. I further proposed that all the *Ashramites* would recite the *Keertan* in the *Natmandir* whereas I would myself do it alone near the shrine.

The *Keertan* continued with the right spirit and tempo in different melodies till the midnight. Thereafter one by one began to dose, the eyelids involuntarily coming closer and closer. Now and then an exclamation of 'Lord, how tired I am', accompanied by a violent yawn was being heard. Minutes past twelve, every one fell asleep. I also followed suit and slept inside the *Pooja* room. The *Ashram* which was active and brisk and full of life a little while ago, must have become dull, inactive, and lifeless.

By about four O' clock in the morning, a knock was heard at the entrance door, It was no one else than the Maharaj who had just then arrived from Calcutta. With his cane

in hand, he beat everyone who was deep asleep or just sub-consciously awake. His hand-stick moved quicker than the punch of a boxer, a rapidity must one see only to believe. The Ashramites yelling and crying left the place by scaling over the hedge. In fact some of them left the *Ashram* for good.

Awakened by the hue and cry, I observed a furious looking Maharaj in the dull rays of the eclipsed moon. He dashed against me in the *Pooja* room and pulled me out to the *Natmandir*. Holding one end of the *lathi* (stick) in both his hands, he hammered me with his teeth clenched and brows knit close. I was not at all annoyed or angered then as I was prone to be on such occasions. I decidedly knew I was on the wrong side I was seriously repentant for my lapses. Maharaj struck me hard and I fell down. Immediately getting up I showed my right arm, then my left and lastly my back. As Maharaj was planting one blow after another, I was telling myself that they were indeed necessary to correct my lapses.

The eclipse was over and the sun rose up on the east. Maharaj summoned me to take bath along with him near the well. I complied and accompanied him. I had forgotten that I was beaten black and blue by the Swamijee just a while ago. On his return from bath he noticed long red stripes with blood oozing out on my back. Maharaj asked me, "Isn't it awefully paining," "I was duly punished for my mistakes, Sir," I replied. He realised the severity of the beating. He felt very sorry for what had happened. He took me along with and personally applied hot fomentation to the affected parts like a mother. He also applied some medicine. In moments of reflection, I convinced myself "Pain, thou art an evil necessity."

Chidananda Maharaj used to advise me to read the *Bhagbat-Geeta* regularly and explain to me the contents and the implications thereof. After reciting it for about six months,

I was feeling very much bored, and was not willing to read it one day. When Maharaj complained about it, an inner voice prompted me to say that, I had perhaps read and digested the contents of the *Geeta* times without number in my past births. No more do I feel any attraction for it at present and the contents appear to be intuitively known and valid. The Swamijee was a great Master and having put me to several tests in the past knew well about my temperament. He stopped asking me to read *Geeta* any more from then onwards.

In most of my adventures in my spiritual quest important events usually occurred in a particular month, i. e. in the month of *Phalgun* (February-March) and hence this month is very dear and memorable to me. I was born in the month of *Phalgun*. It was in this month only that I came to the *Ashram* to discover and study the *Sadhus*. My first meeting with Sri Sri Thakur was in the very same month of *Phalgun*. Finally, happy tidings floated around that Thakur would visit the *Ashram* during *Phalgun* of 1935 after a brief stay at Dhuliadanga in the residence of Sri Debendra Chakravarti. It was decided that the Ashramites would go to Dhuliadanga and welcome him to the *Ashram*. The hidden stream of my emotions and anxiety which had all along been frustrated in seeking an outlet, suddenly began to surge like the waves of the river *Phalgu*,* in order to come closer and lose its identity by opening itself into that ocean of kindness incarnate which Srimat Swami Nigamananda Paramahansa himself was indeed considered to be by his numerous devotees and disciples. I was excited in the anticipation of being personally accepted by him as a servant-an humble disciple. I lay in wait for that day which had been eluding me for the last four years after I joined the Khadkuma *Ashram*.

* A mythological river with its water flowing hidden beneath the land.

As the auspicious hour drew nearer the excitement grew faster. Strictly according to the programme, Sri Sri Thakur arrived at Dhuliadanga. He stayed at the residence of Sri Chakravarti for about two to three days. Coming to know about this, Chidananda Maharaj asked me, "Bhola, you better stay here. I shall go to Dhuliadanga and welcome Sri Sri Thakur to the Ashram." I was perturbed to hear this because I was yearning to go to Dhuliadanga. I had no choice left, Purna'da (Srimat Purna Chaitanya Brahmachari; later known as Purnananda Saraswati) and I stayed at the Ashram.

However, on the third day, it became unbearable for me to continue to stay there any longer. Coaxingly, I told Purna'da, "Maharaj, I am feeling ill-at-ease to stay here. I wish to go over to Dhuliadanga to greet Sri Sri Thakur. I shall be back to the Ashram tomorrow. May I have your kind permission?"

Purna'da consenting by his silence, I set out and arrived at Sri Chakravarti's residence at about ten in the evening. I saw devotees, disciples, and others from different walks of life had admiringly and enthusiastically encircled Sri Sri Thakur in the courtyard of Sri Chakravarti in order to listen to him expounding the many intricate topics of '*Sanatan Dharma*'. Frantically I ran near Sri Sri Thakur and fell at his lotus like feet. I felt as if I was engrossed in that limitless joy : profound and inexplicable. I was lost almost completely to myself, quite unaware of what I was doing then. My unexpected presence there did not seem to cause any annoyance to anybody, although I was a bit scared about it. Suddenly it struck to my mind that it was impossible to have peace in life without taking *Deeksha* from a *Sadguru* and without performing *Sadhana* according to his instructions, I therefore asked to myself 'should not Sri Sri Thakur consider me fit to take *Deeksha* when numerous householders are being initiated and blessed by him?'

At night, I had the opportunity of having my bed close to that of Swami Chidananda Maharaj.

With great expectation in my mind I entreated, "Sir, would you kindly request Sri Sri Thakur for my *Deeksha*?" The Maharaj said, "Bhola, you are not yet ripe for taking *Deeksha*. At the appropriate time Gurudev will invite you on his own accord and initiate you.

I was not prepared to swallow this and hence was badly disappointed. I entangled myself in the briars and thorns of controversy. The Maharaj remained firm in his conviction. Just then the clock struck four in the morning and with that my attitude seemed to soften. I was soon repenting: 'What have I done, I did not even allow Swamijee to sleep, He was perhaps right. If *Deeksha* is taken at an immature stage, the chances of failure are greater.' I then decided not to pray for *Deeksha* at any time in future.

Apologetically, I begged, "Oh revered sage, kindly pardon me. Attempting to acquire untimely benefits, I have deprived you of your sleep. I am now free from the delusion, I shall not even for a day get tempted to take *Deeksha* unless called for." Before we could have some rest, the dawn was approaching. We were up again to take up the jobs awaiting to be done the next day.



My Initiation

I Left Dhuliadanga in the forenoon and on reaching the Ashram, I got involved in my usual duties. The news that Sri Sri Thakur would arrive at the Ashram after a couple of days spread far and wide. The devotees, and visitors pouring from all over carried along with them rice, dal, vegetables and other materials as gifts. Everyone looked cheerful and transpired divine joy and bliss. The Ashram atmosphere seemed to vibrate with celestial fervour. The disciples were carrying the palanquin in which Sri Sri Thakur was seated—an unforgettable sight indeed. The loud chants of '*Jayguru*' was resounding all over. The *ululatus* being performed by the women folk and the sounds of cymbals and drums were reverberating in and around the premises.

After offering the prayers and prostrating at the feet of Sri Sri Thakur, the devotees partook of '*Prasad*' and left the Ashram. A detailed programme for special pooja at the shrine and services for Sri Sri Thakur was drawn up according to suggestions of experienced *Sanyasis* and *Brahmacharis* who accompanied him. Priyabrata Brahmachari was entrusted with cooking and I was to act as his assistant. I was satisfied with the duty allotted to me and was trying to discharge it as carefully as possible. The next day I got up at 4 am., took my bath and performed my daily rites. I got the ladies together to dress and size the vegetables for the day's cooking. Before eleven in the morning the kitchen work was complete. What a joy having accomplished the duties !

Seated on a beautiful and ccsy chair, Sri Sri Thakur was surrounded by followers and devotees assembled at his feet to

listen to his enlighten discourses and to receive spiritual guidance. Sri Sri Thakur was answering the questions, lucidly explaining knotty concepts and instilling confidence in the minds of the spiritual aspirants. I was witnessing this grand session with great admiration.

By about 6 in the evening, Purna'da, suddenly summoned for me and directed me to prepare 'Halua' to be offered as Bhog. "How is it you did not tell me about it so long, It is already time for Arati and how can I prepare 'Halua' now with a call's notice," I complained. With a threatening tone, he munched "Have to be done ! Do it as early as possible !" Before I could settle myself, he gave about five seers of Suji and the required quantity of sugar and ghee. Without wasting further time, I started frying the suji.

I was apprehensive that it would be impossible to handle such a large quantity in rather a short period of time. It was already dusk and about time for performing the 'Arati' rite before the shrine. It was, however, getting delayed and hence Sri Sri Thakur wanted to know from Purna'da why 'Arati' had not been done till then. "Thakur, Suji *Halua* is being prepared and 'Arati' cannot be held until that is ready," Purna'da replied.

While my hands were busy in frying the Suji, my sharp ears picked up this talk in the kitchen. However, no one could help it, depending upon the quantity of suji, it would take its own time for getting done.

Just after a little while, in a worried tone Sri Sri Thakur enquired, "Isn't yet the time for 'Arati' ? A hesitating Purnanandajee replied as before, "Sir, Suji is still being prepared, until then 'Arati' has to wait ! After a brief pause, Sri Sri Thakur queried, "Who is in the kitchen preparing the sweet-meat". "Bholanath, Sir," replied Purna'da rather carefreely.

I was listening to the entire conversations but was helpless. Although I was being directly held responsible for the delay and being made a scapegoat, in reality, where was my fault? The next moment I saw Chidananda Maharaj who had so long been present in the meeting, rush to me and squeeze my neck with both his hands. In a fury he shouted "Get out of the *Ashram* at once; you cannot stay even a moment longer!"

That was the end of my patience; at the top of my voice I retorted "Maharaj, I may not stay at the Ashram, however, I am not a *Yogi* of Sri Sri Thakur's stature so as to be able to prepare *Halua* from five seers of *Suji* in a few minutes. Can one add water to the raw *suji*, before it is properly fried? I won't allow that happen! No harm, if you procure *suji* afresh and get the stuff prepared separately through some one else or you may send the raw *suji* to be offered to Sri Sri Thakur as '*Bhog*'. Let me see what sort of Gods all of you are!"

Realising my agitated state, the Maharaj started to console me saying "Look here, Bhola, let us both help prepare it! Soon after, taking up the entire responsibility on himself, the Maharaj poured hot water onto the pan and *Halua* so prepared was sent for '*Bhog*'. When the Arati bells rang Sri Sri Thakur went inside his living room.

Later, I tried to convince Chidananda Maharaj telling "you could have asked me for preparing *suji Halua* earlier. I can assure you that there would not be any delay tomorrow!" On the following day, I faithfully discharged all the duties required of me punctually and in accordance with the programme chalked out for the day. Needless to mention that I prepared the *suji Halua* much ahead of Arati time.

On the third day, the meeting of the Board of Trustees was to be held and many of the Ashramites, *Brahmachari* and

others were to attend it. No one was readily available to wag the *Punkha* near Sri Sri Thakur when he took a nap after lunch. Chidananda Maharaj called for me and said "Bhola, could you waggle the hand fan for Sri Sri Thakur? Beware, he should not get disturbed during his sleep. Readily giving my consent, I took a little trial about the speed of the *punkha* necessary to provide the desired wave of air for Sri Sri Thakur. Then I entered into his bed room and was readily attracted by the form and lusture of his physical body.

This was my first opportunity to stare at him all for myself : perhaps like a situation of love at first sight ! That brilliance of his body, the palms and the feet displaying the hue of fresh lotus captivated my eyes. As was the proportionate built so was the splendour of his personality. I was indeed overtaken by ecstasy just at the sight of his bare body ! 'Blessed is the person that surrendered at his feet,' I told myself ! Slowly my hand began to move and the fan gently swang rhythmically. A profound sense of humility as well as honour overtook me. I thought that my service would be fruitful and worth it, if the divine body could feel at ease with the gentle wave of air provided by the fan.

A short while after, I was at a loss to understand and was sorry to realise that my vision was getting clouded by languor. I was surely getting drowsy and my eyelids slowly but steadily beginning to close. I was under a strong impulse for sleep. My frantic attempts to keep myself awake proved futile. Instead, the tendency intensified and grew beyond control. I started praying for freedom from sleep, but all in vain. With the fan in my hand, I fell down with a jerk on Sri Sri Thakur ! The next moment, however was awake and noticed Sri Sri Thakur open his eyes, look at me for a moment and close them again.

I trembled with fear and was haunted by sundry wild thoughts. Despite my persistent prayers, the goddess of sleep did not desist and had another attack on me. This time I felt that she was coming with added vigour. While uttering "Save me, O', Thakur," I lost control of myself and again fell on his feet. When I regained my senses, I heard Sri Sri Thakur murmur, "Is there none else?" I wanted to tell him, "Sir, if anybody else were here, you would not have to receive the stroke of the fan" but, I could not and I soon saw his eyes close again!

The next moment, I was afflicted by great remorse. I said to myself, 'It is better to quit than to repeatedly hurt Sri Sri Thakur.' My confidence for continuing to provide service to the Guru had been exhausted. I began to ponder, 'If my mortal frame failed so miserably to serve Sri Sri Thakur, what is the use of retaining it? There is no remedy other than suicide!'

Soon after, I rushed upto Chidananda Maharaj. Before I could complete my narration with my voice cracking and the body trembling, he asked those who were nearby, "Take this fellow immediately and lock him up in a room." Next moment, five persons forcibly lifted me and confined me in a closed room. I stayed there helpless. After sometime, I experienced a terrific shiver in my body and fell down fast asleep. When I woke up, I found the Maharaj standing by my side and calling me. I offered my *Pranams* to him. My past remorse had since vanished. Again I got myself fully engaged in work as usual. Admonishing, Chidanandajee whispered into my ears "you must not let your fancy run away with you."

The next morning while I was engaged in my daily routine, I was told that Sri Sri Thakur was discussing with

Sri Chidananda Maharaj, about imparting *Brahmacharya Deeksha* to one of the young Ashramites. Asked to suggest candidates, Chidanandajee replied, "Thakur, there is no one in the Ashram worthy of *Brahmacharya Deeksha*.

Slightly annoyed, Sri Sri Thakur interjected, "why do you think that you are the only one qualified for everything, when I am eager about it. Why don't you try to find a candidate ? "

A perplexed Chidanandajee then implored, "Thakur, then kindly find out for yourself who is that qualified hand ? "

Why ? What about Bholanath ? He appears to hail from a brahmin family and may be quite acceptable ! "

Forthwith Chidanandajee pleaded, "Sir, Bholanath is extremely peevish and impulsive and above all he is a simpleton. Do you prefer such a boy for the *Deeksha* ? " Repremanding Sri Sri Thakur remarked, "Enough of your own wisdom ! Go and bring him at once. I must initiate him into *Brahmacharya*.

Sri Sri Thakur's unflinching interest propelled Chidanandajee to rush to me and announce, "Bhola, you are extremely fortunate : Sri Sri Thakur wants you for *Brahmacharya Deeksha*, come with me and meet him"

I could not believe in the first place that Chidananda Maharaj would even invite me for *Deeksha* ! It was he who just a few days ago was considering it premature for me to approach Sri Sri Thakur for *Deeksha* despite my anxious requests. However, this very same person had also sent me home to have the permission from my relatives before I would get initiated into *Brahmacharya* Ashram. The whole issue appeared to be shrouded in mystery. I was feeling vain-glorious

and my prejudices had made me partially blind to reason. My pride had become my folly. Refusing his call, I told Chidanandajee, "I have no necessity of taking *Deeksha* and I am not going to have it."

Maharaj was slightly annoyed with my present attitude. He went back and tried to convince Sri Sri Thakur "Was not I telling you, Sir, that Bholanath is an idiot," He does not heed your orders and is not even willing to take *Deeksha* !

"Despite Chidananda Maharaj's disapproval and my own indifference and perplexion, Sri Sri Thakur appeared to insist on my becoming his disciple as I was destined to be. On the very day Sri Sri Thakur did shower on me his bountiful mercy and ordered for making arrangements for my *Deeksha*.

Not at all relenting, Sri Sri Thakur commanded, "Chidananda, you better go and bring Bholanath seated on your shoulders if he is reluctant" !

This had its desired effect ! Chidananda Maharaj physically ran to me spell-bound and tried to lift me up so as to have me forcibly carried. At his behaviour I exclaimed, "what do you want, O' Maharaj ! You are the head of the Ashram, you seem to have been a different person today !

"Bhola, Sri Sri Thakur himself asked me that you be conveyed to him as such and he is determined to impart you *Brahmacharya Deeksha*. It is a unique opportunity for you because you have perhaps passed the test and Sri Sri Thakur is going to initiate you uncalled for. But he is also opening my own eyes and dispelling the prejudice I harboured against you. You are lucky beyond all measures. I too thank God because of the opportunity granted to me to witness the divine

motive that actuates the '*Sadguru*' in guiding and uplifting ordinary folks generation after generation."

"Maharaj," said I, "you need not have to take any trouble, let us go; I will walk up myself."

I then followed him upto Sri Sri Thakur and prostrated before him. With a remarkable gesture Sri Sri Thakur said, "Bhola, I want to induct you into *Barhmacharya* order and necessary arrangements are being made for the purpose. You can go and do your work. I will send for you again" !

Setting aside the currents of conflict (still running across my mind) in regard to my real worth or ability for getting initiated by a towering spiritual Master like Sri Sri Thakur, I did give my mute consent. All the same, Sri Sri Thakur's invitation had, in fact, created a lot of excitement and anxiety in me for experiencing what they describe as a "*Deeksha*." My inadvertent conduct the other day when I was sent to serve Sri Sri Thakur with the hand fan was still hurting me within and was arousing in me a sense of guilt. However, Sri Sri Thakur's insistence against the protests of Chidananda Maharaj had greatly encouraged me. I was getting overwhelmed !

I took my bath and put on new ochre coloured clothes prescribed for a *Brahmachari* and waited for the supreme call ! After sometime I was sent for. I went near Sri Sri Thakur. After offering my *Pranam*, I sat before him. He was reading a newspaper. He looked at me and said, "I have still some work to do. Come after sometime." I approached him thrice at short intervals.

On my last approach I noticed him seated facing the main shrine. I paid my respects again and sat just in front of him such that the shrine remained at my back. Noticing this, sternly he enquired, "Don't you know what is behind you ?"

"Sir, I replied humbly, the shrine is behind me no doubt, but I have been so long worshipping your picture on the shrine, and now when I face your physical form with the shrine at my back why should it be taken as a misdemeanor?"

With a smile on his lips Sri Sri Thakur said, "All right, sit on the side, so that you do not violate the prescribed custom - after all, the established shrine is also holy and should be treated as such ! When you have worshipped there everyday, how can you now ignore it just because I am present here temporarily ? Real *Sadhus* always respect the symbols and images for the sake of promoting the ideals" I In obedience, I then sat in such a way that the shrine remained to my right. A few seconds later he said "Come now, you will have your *Deeksha* !

He entered inside the *Asan Mandir* and I followed him. He sat on the *Asan* (usually of rug) intended for him, and asked me to sit on another placed nearby.

The golden moment was approaching fast ; Although I was mentally preparing myself to receive *Deeksha*, finding Sri Sri Thakur all alone inside the *Asan Mandir*, I spoke out "Sir, kindly excuse me if I ask you some questions and seek a few clarifications ! I must consider myself lucky indeed, for you have kindly chosen me for initiation today. I too had been very much eager, like others, to get initiated by the greatest of the contemporary spiritual masters, but am I worthy of receiving shelter as a disciple at your holy feet ?" The hesitation expressed by Chidananda Maharaj with regard to my initiation and my own lack of education, not to mention of my meagre knowledge of our scriptures, had weighed heavy on me and made me diffident".

Sri Sri Thakur quickly guessed my predicament and asked what is the reason for your inferiority complex?"

I sort of repeated : "Do I have the needed qualification to become your disciple ?" Sir, I have a very poor memory. Whatever you would teach me and whatever '*Mantra*' you would impart me, can I remember all that ?

I ~~was~~^{was} indeed skeptical ! ~~What~~^{With} a pleasant smile Sri Sri Thakur added, "What, if I myself take the responsibility of getting the '*Mantra*' implanted in your memory ?"

In that case, I said, "I have little objection for the *Deeksha*" but, would I be able to undertake difficult *Yoga Sadhana* or any other form of worship following your instructions ? I enquired again.

"You are not required to undertake any austere *Yogic exercise*, my spiritual powers and grace would automatically activate you in the path of *Sadhana*" Sri Sri Thakur's unambiguous statements were thus infusing confidence in me !

Lastly, I wanted to know from him if it was compulsory for the disciples to faithfully follow the rules of the *Ashram*. Sri Sri Thakur dictated, "If you want to stay at the *Ashram*, you have to abide by the prescribed rules and the customs. However, if you stay outside, behave as you like. There is no compulsion about it !"

My gracious *Gurudev* by his inimitable style of advisement did thus knock out all premonitions and dispelled all doubts, thereby opening the flood gates to spiritual fulfilment of an ordinary devotee like me. He initiated me into the *Brahmacharya Ashram* and performing *Saktavishek* according to the Tantric Rites, imparted a new direction to my life. I was indeed fortunate that the virtuous deeds performed in my past births propelled me and enabled me to take refuge at his holy feet.

Sri Sri Thakur then suggested, "Why don't you try meet me some time again—there is a special need for it" I replied, "O Thakur, I am not capable of meeting you. But you can summon and enable me to see you at your own pleasure."

With a smile in his lips he said, "Can't you try once and see?" I then submitted, "Sir, you know what is best for me, I have none except you. I have wholly surrendered myself before you. Whatever you wish that will be done."

It is just impossible for me to express in words all my feelings at that celestial moment and convey the meaning of profound and kind gestures made by Sri Sri Thakur when I was with him inside the *Asan—Mandir*. Finally, Sri Sri Thakur declared according to the convention of the *Sringeri Math*, "From today onwards you will be titled as Bhola Chaitanya Brahmachari. You now go, greet the *Sadhus* and *Sanyasis* and partake of *Prasad*." Spellbound and enraptured with divine joy, I obeyed his orders.

In the afternoon, Sri Sri Thakur addressed the devotees and the disciples gathered at the *Ashram*. One and all listened to him with great interest and admiration. His illustration based on his profound knowledge of the scriptures and his deep realisation of the eternal truth and of God served to dispell all doubts from the minds of the materialist and the half believer and reinforced the faith in those who already had some interest for spiritual development. After the meeting, rapturous *Jayguru Keertan* commenced with the beating of drums and cymbol. The devotees started chanting and dancing rhythmically with uplifted hands. In the process, they lifted Sri Sri Thakur already seated on the chair and went round the *Mnadir* (i. e. the temple). Then there was a long queue for offering *Pranam*. After everyone greeted him, Sri Sri Thakur went inside for taking rest.

The next morning was marked by Sri Sri Thakur's departure from the *Ashram*. Each one of us was kept busy from the early hours of the morning. By about 8 in the forenoon, *Bhoga* was offered. One by one we approached Sri Sri Thakur and offered *Pranam* at his feet. On my turn, I prostrated before him. He was beaming with a smile. Since that time, his smile has remained impressed on my mind even till today. All of us bade him farewell with a heavy heart: the parting was extremely painful. It was as if someone was snatching him out of us. It was like the anguish of the *Gopis* when they were foreshaken by *Krishna* at Brindaban.

Thakur was seated on the palanquin and the disciples were vying with one another to carry it along. Finally, the palanquin was lifted on the shoulders of the luckiest ones—their lips sputtering "*Jayguru*". It was a magnificent sight yet a touching moment of parting of the head of the spiritual family. It marked the end of almost a week's heavenly activity and spiritual excitement. The bearers paced slowly with the palanquin hanging from their shoulders and gently tossing Sri Sri Thakur seated on it. He was looking serene and sad: his eyes sparkling with tears. He could not stay longer and had to move to attend to other duties. It appeared as if a newly wed bride is taken from her parents for the first time to the abode of her father-in-law.

Followed by many, Sri Sri Thakur reached Garbeta Railway Station where already a big crowd was waiting for his '*Darshan*.' He boarded a first class compartment of the train. The Ashramites returned to Khadkuma and the family men and women turned home-ward ruminating the sermons and instructions they had received from Sri Sri Thakur. The *Ashram* looked sombre and lonely. We resumed our daily routine and returned one by one the articles temporarily procured for the special occasion.

Just a few days after, I realised that I was unable to recollect the *Mantra* Sri Sri Thakur taught me. After taking *Deeksha* I remained awfully busy with various kinds of work allotted to me. I had little opportunity to repeat the '*Mantra*' in a regular manner—neither I had a real strong zeal to do this exercise ! The assurance of Sri Sri Thakur that even if I did not try to remember the *Mantra*, his powers would force it into my memory had made me carefree. I was initiated as a matter of course and I was no more keen than my formal curiosity had required. Until that time I did hardly see for myself any need to attain a real superior level in yogic practices. However, in my quest to find lasting peace for the rest of the life, I had desired to have the company of *Sadhus* and watch the modes of their living. It was for these reasons I got out of home. I wanted nothing else. Somehow I started deeply brooding over the issue 'if within a week following my initiation, I forgot the *Mantra*, what good am I as a human being and what higher attainments can I have ?' All my sincere attempts to recollect the *Mantra* having proven futile, I remained buried in eerie thoughts.

At this point of time, I was asked to go out of the *Ashram* on some important work. It was a forest track. While plodding along the lonely trail, mechanically I just sat down under a tree and tried to recollect the *Mantra*. Surprisingly, I felt as if I was gradually losing consciousness. However, about an hour after, I regained my senses and in a flash as if I could recollect the *Mantra*. Lo and behold, ! I was capable of repeating the *Mantra* with the rhythm of my breath. I did not proceed further on the job for which I was commanded. The spontaneous action of the *Mantra* made me feel perceptibly charged in my body and mind.

On return to the *Ashram* I narrated the whole incident to Chidananda Maharaj. "I had forgotten the '*Mantra*,'" I told him but now it is working automatically within me. There is no way to forget it again." Maharaj consoled me saying, "Bhola, you are in a far better state at present. Sri Sri Thakur has showered immense blessings on you, The imperishable seed he sowed in you has now taken roots !

I meekly submitted, "Maharaj, I am astonished as to how these changes are taking place in me !"

"Look, he said, the merciful *Gurudev* always has remained alert for your well-being. Surrender to him and remain with equanimity. "

Since that time even if by inadvertance my mental contact with it had been lost, the *Mantra*, however, seemed not to have parted with me : it perhaps vibrated incessantly within. It is now part of me--nay it is verily my identity ! There is no question of forgetting it anymore.



Moving Adrift

With the ever operating cycles of seasons, came the month of *Shravan*, (mid July to mid August) signalled by the cloud bearing monsoons. Fast approached the birth anniversary of Sri Sri Thakur, earmarked by the day of the full moon, the '*Poornima*'. Preparations were going on for celebrating this auspicious annual event in a befitting manner by performing special *Pooja*, *Keertan*, *Hawan* and recitations of "*Bhagbad-geeta*" and "*Chandi*", etc.

I was as usual working very hard and on the eve of this occasion had to go to bed rather late. Sri Sri Thakur appeared in my dream and seemed to beckon me "Well, won't you wake up, ? why are you still asleep ?" Hearing this, I at once jumped up from my bed and kneeled down at his feet to offer my '*Pranam*'. Then I enquired, Sir, how suddenly did you appear here and wherefore ? Sri Sri Thakur explained, "Look Bhola, I had asked you to meet me once, but you did not care to comply. Hence I had to come myself. It is because I have reached almost the last act of the play in the present life, now I have to quit ! My only regret is that I have not so far been able to help you spiritually progress to fulfilment."

With tears in my eyes, I beseeched, " O' Thakur, does it please you to say so ? Haven't I completely surrendered myself to you ? I know none other than you. How could you leave me alone ? You have been extremely merciful in giving me shelter at your feet. The ever vigilant *Guru-shakti* at your instance has energised me and spontaneously induced '*Mantra*

chaitanya' within me. I have not yet started any formal *Sadhana* as is usually required for developing the minimum spiritual insight; I need not mention about attempts to attain '*Brahma-jnana* (Brahman consciousness) through *yoga sadhana* ! Is that at all attainable in this birth without your help in the physical plane ? I do not like to part with you till I attain absolute peace" !

Hearing my entreaties, Sri Sri Thakar said, "Dear Bhola, may I advise you to return home ? Your maternal aunt (wife of uncle Gadadhar is waiting for you. She will help you to attain whatever you desire" !

Disapprovingly I pleaded, "Thakur, Don't you please ask me to go back home anymore. Do you like me to get entangled in the worldly ties once again ? No one in my family had at any time uttered the first syllable of God. Hence I am not prepared to leave you and go elsewhere whether or not you help me as you wished to".

"All right then, come with me," he suggested. With a pleasant smile, he caught hold of my hand and walked along. I noticed that both of us approached my maternal aunt. Addressing her Sri Sri Thakur said, "Look here, Mother, May I request you to take charge of this boy and kindle him up a bit" ?

"Why don't you get this done through some one else ? How am I connected with him ?", my aunt snapped.

Insistently Sri Sri Thakur reiterated, "This part of the job, O' Mother, is surely yours and the boy cannot progress unless the potential power in him is aroused and activated at your behest ?"

The next moment aunt had only to move her palm on my head or some other point of my body, and lo, it was just

like the touch of the magic wand ! As a consequence I realised that something was made to enter in me. Immediately, my mind was filled with a strange experience and I was lost to myself with unusual delight. The time seemed to stop flowing, the space all around was filled with joy. Such was the effect of that magnetic touch.

“The work is over, let us leave”, so saying Sri Sri Thakur summoned me and holding me by my hand, as before, he returned back to the *Ashram*. The next moment I found myself wide awake still experiencing the traces of the joyous dream sticking up in the layers of my memory. I narrated the entire story to Sri Chidanandajee. His remarks were that ‘a dream involving the Guru usually comes true one day or the other. But it is futile to run after the dream.’ Therefore, I tried to dismiss the dream sequence from my mind and no longer bothered about it.

At this time, I was reaching 30 years of age. After my meeting with Sri Sri Thakur and my maternal aunt, in that uncanny dream (which was to come unbelievably true shortly afterwards), urged by involuntary sex instincts I began to have bed wetting due to discharge of semen. At times I wondered whether this plight of mine was due to incessant *Japa* based on the technique taught by my *Gurudev*. I never entertained such feeling nor I had any occasion to imagine that sex instinct might bother me one day. By and by I encountered my near and dear relatives in my dream.

I confessed the state of affairs to Chidananda Maharaj. With his guidance I had been already practising *Asanas*, *Mudra* and such other exercises as would be congenial for a celibate. I was observing diet restrictions too. But despite all this there was no control on nocturnal flow and in fact it worsened with time.

I was very dear to Chidananda Maharaj. Although an ascetic he always bestowed on me the love and affection of a father trying always to keep me at ease and cheerful. Lest I might feel disturbed or depressed by solitude, Maharaj was always keeping close company. I too preferred to remain close to him. He once took me to Bankura, although I had nothing to do there, so that I might not brood or feel depressed. But all was ⁱⁿvain. I had no relief from the fall of semen. The climax was reached when one day even during the noon time there occurred profuse discharge of seminal fluid.

With unusual feeling of shame and distress, I caught hold of the feet of Maharaj and cried, "With what shall I survive, O, Maharaj. ? Am I to lose all my vitality in this manner ?" 'Doesn't my condition run counter to the vow of *Brahmacharya*. How will it be possible for me to practise higher modes of yogic *Sadhana* unless my condition is corrected and my basal sex centres remain unexcited", ?

Maharaj deliberated very deeply on what I stated and then said " the Divine Mother, as I can see, has boundless mercy in store for you. Very few are as fortunate as you are."

"I am already in death bed; when can I have the mercy of Mother" I rejoined.

Maharaj then went on, "Bhola, indeed you are lucky to receive Her grace by way of such reversals ! The way She acts in you and attracts you, one day She is bound to reveal herself before you. I may assure you that she will one day give you the key to unfold this mystery ! "All that may come to pass by the strength of your blessings !" I said.

From Bankura, Maharaj and myself went to Purulia. We spent a few days in the residence of our spiritual brother Krishna Gopal. We then proceeded to Chakradharpur. We stopped there and lived for a while with brother Santosh. Then we left for Manushmundia via Tatanagar. At Manushmundia we became guests of Sri Satchidananda Bhola. During our stay there I implored to Maharaj, "Would you permit me only once to go to see Sri Sri Thakur ? He specifically had asked me to meet him at the time of initiation. I shall deem it a great privilege, if I was given this opportunity."

Expressing unwillingness the Maharaj told, "Bhola, a lot of work is pending at the *Ashram*. You better go there I shall proceed to Calcutta via Tamluk. I shall convey your desire to Sri Sri Thakur, and if he approves of it, I shall arrange to send you to him." Abiding by his instruction, I returned to the *Ashram* at once.

On the next day, i.e. 13th day of *Margasira* (November — December) Bengali 1342 (A. D. 1935) at about 1 pm our beloved Sadgurudev entered *Mahasamadhi* at Calcutta. He was only 56. I realised with surprise that my dream had partly come true. My faith was further strengthened in consideration that although Thakur had left his physical form, he was indeed omnipresent. His demise, therefore, never meant that he parted with us for ever. Yet, when the news of his sudden and unexpected death reached me, my body became almost numb and the mind nearly vacant. I noticed the other *Ashramites* afflicted with varying degrees of grief - some had eyes filled with tears, some others standing motionless and yet others were speechless. Some were seen observing prayers and other rituals as a mark of respect to the departed soul. The passing away of Sri Sri Thakur created a variety of reactions in the minds of his disciples commensurate with the intensity of their devotion for him.

Silent and stupefied though I was, I began to wonder if I would ever in life get the opportunity of meeting again this divine personality—my revered *Gurudev*, the torch bearer, the guide and the guardian of my life. His sudden exit from my life's drama, deprived me of the opportunity of seeking from him solutions to spiritual problems and offering my obeisances at his lotus like feet once again. I was overtaken by the feeling of helplessness for having to miss him in his mundane form for all times to come.

The body of Sri Sri Thakur was laid at rest at the Dakshin Bangala Saraswat *Ashram* in Halisahar, West Bengal. According to the decision of the Board of Trustees, Chidananda Maharaj was appointed as the *Mahant* of the Assam Bangiya Saraswat *Math*, with its headquarters then located at Kokilamukh near Jorhat in Assam. Before he proceeded to assume his new responsibility he visited Khadkusma Ashram and advised us to sincerely discharge our assigned duties and that alone would constitute true service to Sri Sri Thakur. This was also necessary for smooth and efficient management of the Ashram. Purna Chaitanya Brahmachari was appointed by him as the Head of the Ashram in his absence at Khadkusma.

I went up to Gadabeta Railway Station to see him off. During this time, I explained to him at great length about my mental state and my feeling of helplessness. I requested him to allow me to go over to the headquarters of the *Math* along with him. But he hastened to disapprove of this. However, he blessed me saying "Bhola, don't get disheartened. Better days are in store for you. You will be well established and will make steady progress to attain higher levels of realisation." I had, therefore, to take leave of him and return to the *Ashram*.

Before long, however, I again became restless and lost interest in work. I was no more left with the zeal I once had.

The Ashramites adversely reacted to the deteriorating management of the *Ashram*. There was polarisation among Ashramites: some supporting the tutelary Head whereas others opposing him. Innocent ones like me were used as pawns in the game. Complaint petitions were sent to the Mahant Maharaj raising allegations against me and a few others. As a result, the next year the Maharaj again visited the *Ashram*. He convened a meeting of the Ashramites and for one more year Srimat Purna Chaitanya Brahmachari was allowed to continue as the Head.

In the course of imparting advice as before, the Mahant Maharaj warned us not to neglect Ashramic work. "Every one", he asked, "should endeavour to see that the properties of the *Ashram* are well protected and efficiently managed." The Maharaj took special interest in me and made it a point to discuss with me in detail about all affairs. I placed before him the true picture of the tensions and tribulations that had prevailed in the *Ashram*. Maharaj took leave of us and went back to Assam.

There was hardly any improvement, in the meantime, in my own mental state. I continued to feel depressed and at times restless. I was not able to decide where to go and get relief. The nocturnal malady persisted causing me inexplicable sorrow and anxiety. The added insult to the injury was the attack of headache which I used to get during this time. Amidst misery and moroseness, I had to wait for unfailing guidance and directions from the invisible *Sadgurudev*.

Un-noticingly time skipped on. One day while I was reminiscing on the past and calling to mind the hardship I had already submitted myself to, I received a letter from the Mahanta Maharaj. The letter conveyed, "A person named Srikanta Mahata of Manbazar came to the *Math* and expressed his desire to donate some land for the Khadkuma Ashram and

then join the Ashram himself as a *Sadhu*. Better go with him, enquire about the matter and finalise the transaction This job is entrusted solely to you.” Srikanta Mahata met me to make over the letter. At that time one Srimat Bimal Chaitanya Brahmachari had been directed to take over as the new Head of the Khadkuma Ashram. Srimat Bimal Chaitanya and Srikant Mahata both had returned from Assam at the same time.

Due to mental and physical disturbances, I was hating to go out anywhere. I wrote back to Mahanta Maharaj to inform that I was not in a position to go to Manbazar because of my dismal state of the mind. Consequently I also felt physically so weak that I had little interest left with me for any work. Further I had a special dislike to visit Manbazar area because my maternal uncle's village was located nearby. My visit to that locality might well become the cause of attraction for my homestead and that might toe me down in a different track. To my letter Maharaj replied, “If you don't like to obey my orders, you better keep out of the Ashram ! You can't live there any longer unless you go with Srikanta Mahata and get the land registered without fail and as soon as possible.

I was almost in a fix and unable to decide my next course of action. Having lived for over five years, my attachment for the Ashram had grown fairly strong. I witnessed

also that Sri Bimala Chaitanyaji took over as the new Head of the Ashram and that the earlier Head left the Ashram for good. This was in obedience to Mahanta Maharaj's instructions. 'If I did not obey the orders', I thought, 'I too would have to quit the Ashram. I therefore, preferred to cooperate with the Mahanta Maharaj even though this would mean going out of the Ashram in an unbalanced state of mind. Unwillingly, therefore, I started off with Srikanta Mahata to Manbazar for registration of the land while muttering myself "Oh, Thakur thy wish alone will be fulfilled. Thou only know where thou art leading me to!"



Mother's Descent

Srikanta Mahata was a native of village Rangatau in the Manbazar area. Having left Khadkuma, Srikanta and I reached Rangatau by about dusk. Soon after our arrival in the village, we met with an awesome situation. Instead of cordially receiving us as was customary in the countryside, the villagers surrounded us and shouted "Catch hold of the buggers and kill them". At this, I was dumb-founded and cried out "What, for Heaven's sake, is all this?" I stood blanched with terror and trembling violently. Being helpless and scared for life I started praying, "O, Thakur, you are my only refuge. Unless you save us, these ruffians will finish us in no time." No one was prepared to listen to any thing amidst that chaos.

With inportunate effort, I learned that as Srikanta had remained untraced soon after the death of his wife, a rumour gained wide publicity that Srikanta killed his wife and absconded from the village. This was at the root of the rage of the villagers. As soon as Srikanta was in their sight they seized him along with me and wanted to thrash both of us. As soon as I came to know this, I just appealed, "I have done no harm to anybody ; and why are you after me ?" They said, "Since you have come with Srikanta and might support him, we consider you as a party to the crime. Therefore, we will kill both of you."

Fortunately, at that moment I could recollect that the paternal aunt of Srikanta was known to me. Her parents lived in Delang where I had opened a shop long ago; I sent for her and introduced myself when she came up. I told her that

despite my innocence the people of the village had surrounded me and had been threatening to kill me. "You are the only one to protect and help me," I appealed to her desperately. My request had its effect.

Addressing the villagers, she announced, "Hold up, this *Sadhus* is the nephew of the Zamindars of Maheshpur. If they came to know of your evil designs and if any harm is caused to his person, the entire village will be in ruins. Think over before you proceed. Have faith in me and leave him." Such strong warning from this lady made them unarmed.

Even so, I couldn't get a wink of sleep during the night. I just kept praying *Gurudev* through out. Early in the morning next day, I told Srikanta "you get matters squared up with your people first; the land will then be registered. Now I am leaving for Maheshpur, my maternal uncle's village and shall come back when you inform me." Soon afterwards, I proceeded to Maheshpur.

I had to cover nearly fifteen kilometers on foot before arriving at my maternal uncle's house. It was 10 in the morning. I felt very much aggrieved to discover that uncle Gadadhar was no longer alive. His demise had taken place nearly a year ago. The news was so much unexpected that I could not just believe it. He was not too old and I loved him dearly, for, in my opinion he was the best, the noblest of my well wishers ! He too loved me as a father, a friend and was my true benefactor.

After his death the fate of my widowed aunt had become miserable. I gathered that she had been behaving eccentrically. But surprisingly enough, instead of talking nonsense, she was mostly reciting God's name and glory by continually singing devotional songs. She was the mother of five children thro

sons and two daughters. The eldest son was nearly fourteen. He was practically managing the household. He even cooked food for all and looked to their comforts. Aunt was not at all bothered about anything ; on the contrary, was singing continually in an excited mood.

I took stock of the whole situation till my head began to reel. I said to myself, 'What a strange situation am I now to confront with, O, Thakur ?' The news of the mental derangement of my aunt had, by then, received wide publicity and light talks were floating in the village like fragments of summer cloud. Some took her as a crazy bigot, while some others described her as a devil's nest. I was unable to reconcile with what was going on. I had, however, no explanation to offer about the phenomenon. By and by I was feeling increasingly helpless.

'I started out as a renunciate but as the matters stood, by the force of circumstances, was I to entangle myself in the worldly business again !' I wondered.

I thought over the matter carefully vis-a-vis my own role both as a relative and as an ascetic and recognising that she needed prompt care and medical treatment, 'should it not behove on me to attend on her ? I asked myself.' The next morning I proceeded to Purulia and after consulting a Kaviraj purchased a bottle of Himsagar hair oil. I presented her the bottle of oil and told "Kindly apply this on your head and it will soothe and cool the brain." "Ah, Bhola," said she, "what is the matter with you ? Am I sick ? Why can't you realise it ? What on the earth has happened to me ?" Wonderstruck with her reply, I explained to her. "Dear aunt, your brain has been heated up and excited. Should not you abide by the prescription of the Kaviraj ?" To this she retorted, "Not my brain, may be your's because I am sticking in the house, whereas you have become a *Sanyasi* and have left and gone. Can't you judge who has gone mad ?"

I stood wonderstruck listening to her logic. I failed to promptly come by a suitable counter-statement ! However, after a bit of deliberation, I queried, "Why do you then continually sing and recite as if under the influence of a spell ? Keep silent for a few days, I would then infer that you are normal."

"All right, I shall obey the orders of the *Sadhu*, and shall keep silent for a period of seven days. However, if I were to keep mum for longer, it may be adverse enough for the community !"

She consented. From that moment, she maintained silence. She remained as cold as snow and as strong as rock. She was shut up and sang no longer. She even did not ask for food and had to be offered and fed ! Seven days passed with a quiet atmosphere prevailing in the household. I was amazed by such behaviour of my aunt.

'A mad person could never remain quiet,' I rationalised ! 'How could she keep up her promise ? How could then she be considered mad ?' I continued to be bothered by such perplexing questions !

People in the neighbourhood asked me, "Sadhujee, what has happened to your aunt ? Is she haunted by a spirit ?" I was unable to give a positive reply.

In fact I myself was in the dilemma, not able to decide whether she was actually mad ! To me she was not appearing normal nor could I take her as a precocious personality naturally charged with divine inspirations. That was never her character as far as I remembered having dealt with her in the past when my uncle was alive. Therefore, when aunt could

maintain her promised seven-day silence and resumed singing and reciting afterwards I got thoroughly puzzled.

As I had been initiated into the *Brahmacharya* Ashram, I preferred to stay at the *Durga Mandap* (A quadrangle under a roof where goddess Durga presides in the villages) instead of in my maternal uncle's house. I used to perform *Pooja*, *Japa* (repetition of *Mantra*) and other daily religious rites, cook my food and sleep in the night at the *Mandap*.

Once, towards the last part of the night, I dreamed of a gathering of some men and women at an unknown but beautiful place. Playing on the Tanpura three women were singing sweet melodies with wonderful appeal. Of the three, there was one familiar face and she was my maternal aunt. I couldn't recognise the other two women. The songs were so sweet and fascinating that the audience was spell bound. I enjoyed the songs to my heart's content. "I can hardly express the joy and delight I gained in that short spell. It was the 'Happy, hour, O most' in my life.

With a sudden snap I woke up, but the hypnotic note of the music was still ringing in my ears. I was yet unable to leave my bed. Before dawn, aunt came to the *Durga Mandap*, and cried aloud "O, Sadhujee, are you here to eat and sleep ? You have been sleeping till now, how can you realise God ? Are you still lured and lost in the melody you have been listening to ? Would you let me know about it ?"

It was beyond my comprehension that aunt could be alluding to the dream ! Interpreting her in a down-to-earth way, I reacted, "Why do you talk of music ? How am I concerned with it ? I never went out for it." At this my aunt exclaimed, "What, being a *Sadhu*, you do not fear lying ? Did not you hear me sing a while ago ? Isn't the tune still ringing in your ears ?"

My aunt's expostulations lead me to stupefying amazement and shame. I had no words to offer. Quickly trying to dismiss all my embarrassment, I did confess having enjoyed music and the songs in the dream. I then short-circuited the conversation, got up from the bed, and went out to take bath and attend to other morning rituals.

When I was back to myself, I experienced a sort of a languor in the mind. I thought 'it was wellnigh impossible to dig into the mystery of what had been happening around !' I then hummed to myself, 'How long should I stay on in my uncles' village ?' No information had yet been received from Srikanta Mahata. 'Won't it be disirable to go back to the *Ashram* ?' I debated within myself. Next moment, I went upto uncle's house, called on aunt and submitted, "May I take leave and go back to the *Ashram* tomorrow ?"

"Do whatever you like. Who, after all, can endear and confine a *Sadhu* ?" So saying, she quickly left the place

I went back to the *Durga Mandap*, relaxed all day and night and continued to remain engrossed with stray thoughts about my future which appeared to be rather gloomy and insecure. The next morning after performing my routine exercises, early enough I went to my uncle's house to cook and eat my lunch before the departure. As I started to eat, I felt the' attack of a fever. I just had to discontinue eating lest a heavy stomach accentuates the sickness. I left off the food and came back to *Durga Mandap* and slept wrapped myself under a rug.

In the meantime, aunt peeped into the kitchen where I had cooked my food and found how I left the plate of rice almost untouched. She asked the children "Whose plate of rice is this ? Why is this lying here ?" They replied, "Sadhu Dada's because he is suffering from fever."

The news appeared to greatly irritate her. Almost steaming in anger, she came over to the *Durga Mandap*, approached my bed, scolded me and tauntingly remarked, "you have become a *Sadhu*, and if you die it will cause little damage to anybody. But why do you try to invite evil to my household? You have to eat this rice, even if you die."

Considering her complaints, I had to get up and while shivering with the rug on my body I came back and decided to eat the food without a demur. And lo, as I sat down to take my food, I felt as if the fever had gone. And the greater surprise was my aunts' flashing question "Is the fever now off?" I had to nod in acquiescence, but I was getting utterly puzzled by her behaviour. She then sarcastically remarked "You are a *Sadhu*, but you have no knowledge as to how does the fever enter and leave your body? What caused the attack and the remission?"

While I was deeply pondering to decipher what was then happening, my aunt commanded "you better quit this place after taking food."

By then I was feeling extremely weak physically and mentally and hence I requested her, "O' aunt, it is impossible to leave this place today. I shall try to be off tomorrow." She then left the place without a comment,

A day or two after this incident I casually noticed my young cousin (the three and a half year old daughter of my aunt - her youngest child) 'Bhandi' play alone with sand and dust in a corner of the *Durga Mandap* and quit the place as soon as I went out. She never talked to me nor did I to her, as if we were strangers.

One day, I was late for my morning bath and soon after my return, I sat down for my prayers with eyes closed. As

usual, Bhandi was playing in a corner. She just stammered out, as if, to address me, "Dada, what is all this ritual for ? If by closing the eyes, God would appear, then the blind would have seen him ! If by sitting with legs crossed, there came God realisation, many a lame person would have achieved it ! By keeping the head down and the legs up in the air (She was referring to the *Shirshasan* I used to perform) if one were to find the Almighty, Lord, why then are the bats swinging from the tree without any avail ! Also, people could have attained salvation long since if by merely uttering, '*Jayguru*', '*Jayguru*' could help ! If through prayers and meditation God were to be realised, how many of those waiting for ages, have been able to attain Him ?"

I was at once startled and had to patiently keep hearing, from such an innocent egg, the profound sense her queries carried ^{and} ~~on~~ the sagacity demanded of the valid answers, if any, for her questions. I was visualising that perhaps some divine soul is speaking through her lips : otherwise how could a three year old putforth the arguments with such cogency and confidence ? The realistic assessment of the life style of *Sadhus* made by her appeared to be rather unconventional and this, somehow, compelled me to get deeply attracted for the child.

Respectfully I then called her near me and held her on my lap. Surprisingly I felt her unusually heavy. I asked her, "Then, my young friend, tell me by what means can God be realised ?"

"Only by way of His grace and mercy" was the reply which indeed appeared like an aphorism replete with the quintessence of *Bhaktishastra* (Scripture on Devotion) emanating from the lips of the tiny girl.

She continued, "When my father was almost sinking, my mother broke down completely. I told her to catch hold of his feet tightly, so that father would be held back and

won't pass away. Mother did exactly the way I instructed her. Since then she didn't have to shed a drop of tear from her eyes." (This possibly meant that the spirit of the father was guided to enter into the mother and reinforce her !)

"Could you tell me if I can be able to see God ?" I asked her. She said, "Let me talk to mother tonight, and tell her, that my brother, Sadhu Dada, wants to see God. And after ascertaining her views, I shall let you know tomorrow."

"Do you often meet the Mother ?" I asked.

"Lo, who can prevent me from meeting my mother ?" she reacted.

I, somehow, suppressed my anxiety to further understand as to what indeed she meant by "my mother"—whether it denoted my maternal aunt or some one else; or even some special supernatural power of that name, remained a mystery to me. The way she talked was enough for amazing me. I had a spontaneous outburst of affection and gratitude towards her. The theme she dwelled on was already much beyond her age, let alone the convincing manner she was presenting it. I befriended her and requested her to accompany me to the place (their house) where I used to cook my food.

We talked together for a while. I was all along feeling drawn by her charming character. After the cooking, I served food and asked Bhandi, "Young dear, would you like to take food with me ?" She readily agreed and we partook of food from the same plate.

Minutes later, my aunt appeared on the scene and finding us to eat together yelled, "Hopeless, being a *Sadhu* you allowed my daughter to eat with you ?" I got very much scared but

Bhandi came to my rescue and pleaded, "Why mother, *Sadhu-je* is my elder brother ! I myself desired to take food with him. What is wrong about it ?"

"Oh, did you desire it ? Well, all right, all right !" So saying aunt left the place.

After taking food we two went to the *Durga Mandap*. My attachment and admiration for Bhandi became so great that whatever she told me appeared as gospel. The day's experience remained as an unforgettable event in my life.

The next day, I had a very early bath in the morning and waited for Bhandi's arrival. As soon as she appeared, I took her on my lap, and enquired hurriedly, "What did the Mother tell you last night ?" In her immaculate style she replied, "Dada, I entreated her on your behalf and requested her to kindly appear before you. She was very much unwilling But I again begged of her, explaining that I had already given words of promise to help my Dada meet with you and hence do please acquiesce to my proposal. After a great deal of persuasion she was made to consent. Tonight she shall appear before you."

With mounting anxiety I again asked, "Where on the earth would she like to appear, my young friend ?"

"On the anterior verandah of our house, mother told me."

"But, could your Dada be able to stay alone there ? My mother queried ?" 'Yes definitely, *Sadh* never get scared like ordinary folks', I replied "said she.

I then asked her, "what shall I have to do.?" "Nothing needs to be done; just keep on waiting" she advised.

I was very much pleased to hear this entire account from her. Then on, I waited anxiously for that auspicious moment to meet the Mother. The glow of a simple but unflinching faith was continuing to illumine the hitherto gloom stricken corners of my mind. After supper, I wanted to seek my aunts' permission to sleep on the anterior verandah for the night.

When informed of this she cautioned. "No one sleeps here at night. You are jolly well putting up at *Durga Mandap*; why then here?"

I appealed to her, "Aunt, permit me to sleep here for tonight only." She appeared to consent by her silence and then coolly left the place.

I slept on the verandah, aunt and others slept in their respective rooms. I had no natural inclination for formal prayer or meditation, and as such, the moment my body touched the bed, I fell asleep. By about midnight, I felt as if, someone was kicking me on my buttocks. I got up and surveyed all around; but could not find anybody, not even a bird. But soon after, I noticed some light focussed on the nearby *Jamun* tree. I got a bit scared to see the light, because I was not unaware of the visit of thieves in the locality. I was led to think, that thieves might be attempting to enter into the house.

I thought if I did not pull up courage and rise to the occasion, the helpless aunt and the children would be attacked and sustain loss. On the other hand, if I put up resistance, I would be the first victim of the house and weather the storm. I got fairly frightened and my primary objective of waiting for the promised moment of meeting God appeared to be defeated. My gaze, however, remained firmly fixed on the glow of light on the *Jamuri* tree.

Uncanny events followed thereafter. The patch of light on the tree gradually grew in size such that the entire firmament got illuminated. I then noticed a charming maiden take shape at the focal point and approach me. Her form increased in size and prominence as she came closer. She then asked "Well, do you recognise me ?" Considering her an aspect of the divine Mother I answered, "Yes, Mother, having been motherless from early life I have been longing to meet you—so saying I greeted her.

"Will you obey me, and carry out my instructions ?" was her next question. "Do kindly tell what you expect of me before I could promise to carry it out. I do not know if I am capable enough to perform whatever you desire."

"No, no, you can and are bound to do it. You can't deny." said she. Supplicating, I then said, "Mother, kindly then express your wish."

She then explained, "Look, I have been possessing your aunt for the last two years. Since she has not taken "*Deeksha*" from a *Sadguru*, I am unable to activate or elevate her. You are an active *Sadhak* besides being a Brahmachari. If you could offer worship and pray for me incorporated in her person then I will find an opportunity to manifest myself properly through her."

Those unexpected and funny instructions of the Mother perplexed me for a while. I began to think that people in the village have already taken my aunt as a madcap; and if I started worshipping her I will also be taken as a fool and nothing else !

After a brief pause I said, "Pardon me, Mother, I can't just carry out your orders. It is too much for me."

"Well, she is your aunt, why do you hesitate to worship her ?" She questioned.

"You order me to worship a lunatic ! How can I do that ? It is impossible for me to comply with such nonsense." I reacted.

My disrespectful replies appeared to enrage her and she just commanded, "You have got to worship her. There is no way out." At this I retorted, "I would never do that as long as I am alive. I have been a disciple of *Sadguru Swami Nigamananda*; no one can scare me or compel me to perform silly acts."

"Tomorrow, I shall never allow you to move an inch without offering *Pooja*. I will see how you can escape it !" So saying, she disappeared and there was darkness all around once again.

Soon after, I repented for my discourteous behaviour considering, 'what a blunder did I not commit ? Had I readily agreed to obey her, she would have been pleased with me and fulfilled whatever I wished. God knows what misfortune is in store for me ! People pray and meditate for ages to get a glimpse of the divine Mother. She was kind enough to appear before me even though I had very little virtue at my credit ! Yet I just refused to act the way she directed and in so doing I turned her away.' I tried then to invite some sleep in order to free myself from the clutches of remorse.

Early next morning I had my bath and while debating in my mind as to what should be my true duty relating to the divine Mother's commands last night, I decided, adhoc, to offer some services to aunt instead of formal worship. I fetched water for her to bathe. After bath, when I helped her with her breakfast, she ate and went back to the bed.

Soon afterwards, Bhandi came and in an admonishing tone cried out, "Dada, what a blunder did you commit? It is unbecoming of you to have disobeyed the Mother. She is very angry indeed. She will play havoc and no one is going to be spared!" Bhandi's remarks once again deepened my dilemma and the suspense I was already confronted with.

It was beyond me to probe the mystery as to how Bhandi could have witnessed or been informed about the previous night's drama. Notwithstanding, I replied, "How does it matter whether or not Mother is pleased. Let bygones be bygones! Let us forget the past, I can hardly undo the destiny, I shall try to put up with it." Bhandi then silently left the place.

Last night's vision, my discordant dialogue with the Mother and such other matters continued to keep my mind agitated. Hours rolled on till the mid-day. I cooked my food and after lunch I prepared for taking a nap

The children as usual finished cooking the food. They asked aunt to come and eat. With a thunderous voice she exclaimed, "I will not take any food. Call the *Sadhu*, and I will eat his flesh."

The children came running to me and informed, "Dada, mother isn't taking food. When called, she replied, 'Bring that *Sadhu*, I will eat him.'"

"I hastened to recall that the divine Mother desired me the night before to worship my aunt. She was very adamant about her orders. I, therefore, got very much perturbed and could not decide what to do.

Suddenly, however, I could hit upon a plan. I met some of the relatives and friends in the neighbourhood and described

the entire episode before them beseeching, "Brothers, let all of us go and pacify the aunt." I rationalised to myself, 'Whatever would happen, let it happen in the presence of all, so that everyone will see and know about it.'

Some of them agreed to help me out. We all went to my uncle's house enmass. Aunt was asleep. I went near her and gently addressed, "Aunt, kindly get up, and have your lunch, does it look nice to sleep so long."

She replied with a shrill voice, "Don't you remember what I have told you last night?" My quick reply was, "Yes aunt, but don't you also remember my reply 'I won't be able to carry out the orders!' I never lie I still remain invincible and would like to keep up my promise!" She appeared fairly annoyed and spoke, "All right, I shall have your strength tested!"

She then kept quiet. I was standing like a statue near her. And lo, just after a moment, I experienced a bad shiver inside me. I failed in all my attempts in clinging to the door nearby and with my hand slipping, I fell upon the ground and became unconscious. However, in that bewildered state, I again had the vision of the Mother I had seen the previous night. That was an exciting and blissful experience. I felt greatly relieved and wished very much to continue in that supra-conscious mental state.

I could later on know that while I was lying on the ground unconscious, my aunt dealt a few blows with a stick on my feet. This was witnessed by all those that were present there. Due to these blows my nerves may have been stimulated and regained full consciousness within an hour. I realised then that my ego, pride or self-esteem had completely vanished, and all my past inhibitions were gone. I continued to experience a steady fountain of bliss (never

known before emanating from a central point in my own body. My attention was being drawn inwards and getting focussed on the benign image of the Mother envisioned in my mind. Suddenly I was drifted by a stroke of whim and thought, "What a lapse! Should not the Mother be worshipped? No more time need be wasted." In quick steps I set out to the village pond for having a purificatory bath.

In the mean while, however, I was haunted by scepticism and began to wonder if I was going on a wrong path and if all these incidents are the outcome of witch-craft? If Goddess (the universal Mother) indeed was staging the play, then should she not save me at any time and at any place? I decided then to drown myself in the pond. 'If I died, whom then would she compel to perform her *Pooja*? That would help me uphold my promise! On the contrary, however, if I survived, the truth behind the miraculous appearance of the Holy Mother as well as the divine purpose governing the succession of events would be established beyond doubt' I thought.

Soon after I noticed a stone at the bathing ghat of the village tank. I tied the stone to my chest with my napkin and entered the water. I folded my legs in '*Padmasana*' (lotus posture) and tried to drown myself. Uncanny as it may seem, all my efforts to commit suicide proved to be a failure. My head always remained above the water surface even at the deepest point in the tank. I felt, as if I was floating with the stone tied to my chest. At that moment, once again I had the vision of the Mother appearing and prompting me, "Won't you now believe that none can be able to die without my commissioning it? Why then make futile attempts, my child?" This put an end to the last traces of disbelief in my mind and aroused great zeal for offering '*Pooja*' to my maternal aunt.

I then swam through the water to pluck a lotus flower and straight away went to aunt, without looking this side or that, and placed it at her feet with single minded devotion. Then I offered my obeisances at her feet. From then on, I continued to have a very distinct vision of the divine Mother. I felt, as if, she had untied me from the worldly bondage and severed the fetters of attachment, as if, her unbounded mercy had opened for me the flood gates of a very pleasant celestial abode. Her company was showering on me immense joy, peace and composure.

I liked very much to pray her telling, "Mother, I don't like to be separated from you even for a moment. Kindly keep me always with you." She caught hold of my hand and seemed to traverse through every *chakra* (the nerve plexuses) in the body. I moved with her ascending upwards. I was about to cross the *Brahma Randhra* (the subtle door for exit at the apical point of the body.) and was nearly losing consciousness and getting oblivious of the external world; but my aunt was helping me gain my sense by adopting various methods. At that point of time, I began feeling that I was no different from 'Siva' and my very being was nothing other than "bliss" itself. At times, I started dancing in excitement and at others I was running about valiantly free from all fear and inhibition. My spirit seemed to soar very high and I felt, as if, I possessed tremendous strength. Aunt was trying to pacify and restrain me. By and by I lost my sense of perception to distinguish day from the night. The divine Mother continued to engross me completely and incessantly and endowed me with divine happiness. She seemed to pour the nectar on me; the entire house appeared to get filled with it. I continued to sip the nectar until my pot was filled to the brim. There was no trace of appetite for food or drinks. I remained, as if, fully possessed by a single unadmixed unspeakable supreme feeling.

The next day, aunt took me back to the village tank. She taught me a '*Mantra*' and the technique of *Japa* while remaining under water. She caught hold of my hand and made me sit down along with her in neck-deep water. I never liked to get out. I felt, I was performing '*Japa*' while seated on the lap of the Mother. I remained completely immersed in blissful thoughts quite for some time. When I got out of the water, aunt told me, "Today I initiate you into *Sanyasa* and confer on you the title of "*Yogananda*." After she declared me as a *Sanyasi*, I thought, I should not make any distinction among religion, caste or creed. Hence I, removed my sacred thread and threw it into water. However, she picked it up and put it around my neck. Holding my hand she then brought me back home.

Afterwards, aunt asked me to collect water in lieu of alms from twelve different households. She gave me a pot I collected water from three to four houses in an intoxicated state, not being able to judge which way to move. Just then, aunt stepped in, caught hold of my hand and said, "Enough, now there is no more need for it. You can come back home."

The next day, she ordered me for collecting some rice as alms. I took an empty bag with me. After collecting alms from six to seven houses, she took me back home. I felt, as if, the divine Mother was continually blessing me and my body was shivering all along. I was filled with ecstasy and peace during the entire week that followed.



The Tangle

The exalted state of my mind was not, however, to last very long. The devil entered my head and it started haunting me once again. I was overtaken by the same sort of hallucination which had infected me before I entered the village tank few days ago – were all these events result of witchcraft? I thought it desirable to consult with some other God realised souls i.e. adept *Sadhus*, and to confirm whether the way I have behaved and the spiritual experiences I have gained were not spurious I

How, otherwise, one could be sure about their merit? 'Everybody had taken my aunt to be a crazy woman and I might also be branded as such', I thought.

My aunt, however, seemed to read my mind within moments and said, "I have been thinking to ask for you, Bhola. It seems you haven't been too comfortable, lately."

I replied, "Surely aunt, I was wondering about the possibility of getting down to someone for a bit of consultation." She then commanded, "you quit this place at once. Wherever you find a *Sadhu* of your choice get your doubts clarified and then come back."

Shortly afterwards I took leave of my aunt and proceeded to my native village Ladhuduka and arrived there by about 4 in the afternoon. Lo, what I suspected came to pass. Whoever I talked to, stamped me as a madcap I was terribly annoyed by such treatment received even from my own relatives. It was virtually a reproach.

I left the village and went to one of my Aunt's (mother's sister's) house. There I met my cousin Sri Murari Mohan Goswami. He was the first one, I saw, delighted in meeting me after such a long interval. It was gratifying to find him admire at my state of development and he tried to explain to every one present about the fundamental change that could occur in a man struggling to probe into the mysteries of life and how inscrutable are the ways of destiny ! God may guide and lead the seeker and bestow him with the divine mercy beyond ordinary measure. Those who remain in touch with God become blissful and ecstatic and may at times appear to be crazy.

He said, "God's true devotee gets so much overtaken by joy that he sings, dances and sheds tears without any external physical cause. The eight fold *sattwika* symptoms* of a person who remains in a divine state of consciousness have been described in the scriptures as veritable fact. It is hardly possible for ordinary people to understand the strange transformation of attitude and personality that has occurred in Bholada. These comments of my cousin were very much pleasing and reassuring to me.

After the discussions Murari extended an invitation to me saying, "Will you dine with us tonight ?" "I have taken little food for the last seven days. Could you feed me to my heart's content ?" I asked. My brother remarked that there was nothing to feel shy about eating and I might have anything I liked. A fish weighing four seers was bought for the dinner. Alone I was served with food. I then appealed, "Let all of us sit

* In order of increasing intensity, the external manifestations of a pure devotee (in intimate love with God) are joy, perspiration (akin to that occurs in nervousness) rising of hair (on the skin) shivering, choking of voice, emotional speech concerning divine glory, (spiritual) madness and loss of sense.

together and take food, otherwise there would hardly remain anything for your people to eat !”

Food had been cooked for seven to eight members of their family. All of them laughed at me and I was told to eat as much as I liked. Having, thus, their permission, I started consuming the food. I had a feeling, ‘I wasn’t alone eating, but the divine Mother was also partaking of the food along with me !’ No sooner did they replenish after exhaustion of the original supply, than I consumed it. The entire food stuff they cooked that night, became insufficient for me alone. At the end I asked for some *Muri* to eat, as I was still feeling hungry. Everyone was surprised at this feat. However, I was looking almost normal. “Now, I can eat as much as I am given,” I announced.

At that moment my own elder brother arrived there and said “Let us go to our house, and sumptuous food will be available there.” After feasting in aunt’s house, I came along with my brother to his house. Everyone there was warned (by my brother) against teasing me or behaving ill with me. After spending a night in his house, the next morning I came to Bagalia Railway Station. I took the train and arrived at Garbeta. I visited one of my co-disciples family. He treated me cordially and requested me to be his guest.

After a short while, I was prompted by an inspiration to visit the Khadakusma *Ashram*. After lunch, I left for the *Ashram* in the afternoon. Here again, to my utter disparagement, the Ashramites branded me as crazy. None, for instance, was interested in discussing seriously with me about my spiritual realisations and experiences of the past year. I stayed there for three days, but most of the time was spent in keeping myself completely submerged in the pond, a form of *Samadhi*,

which I was practising although I had learnt the trick only once from my aunt as a matter of course. I was fascinated by this yogic exercise. With very little practice, I used to remain under water for fairly long periods of time. I wondered if I have been practising this "*Samadhi*" during my past life and no sooner I was initiated into the art than, I learned and quickly mastered it. Noticing my ways such as this, the *Sadhus* and *Brahmacharies* of the *Ashram* entertained funny ideas about me.

I was certainly disinterested about my past and did not particularly care for the future, but sure enough cared to understand in the stark present time, the real duties of a monk in relation to the spiritual goal to be attained. Strangely, however, the Ashramites had not a word of sympathy for the struggle I was moving through much less were they interested in religious discourses or yogic practices and achievements. 'Who then, after all, could help me dispel my doubts?' I tried hard to probe into this paradox !

Soon I came to know that there were only three days left for *Jhulana Purnima* (full moon day some time in August), the birth day of revered Sri Sri Thakur. Customarily, every year his birth anniversary, was being celebrated at Kutabpur, where he was born. With the hope of meeting Chidananda Maharaj at this function after a long time and to consult with him about my progress and lapses in the path of my *Sadhana* I was urged by a strong desire to go there.

I went to the Pals (a Jamindar family of Sardiha who were devout disciples of Sri Sri Thakur, in order to collect some passage money. Although at that time, people, in general, were feeling averse towards me, possibly because of my incoherent talks and arrogant behaviour, surprisingly members of Pal's family received me with kindness. I stayed with them for the day. Next morning, I left for Calcutta and reached

Bagbazar where the “Pals” had their shop and business depot. I met a few other co-disciples who were very nice people. They arranged some money for my travel expenses to Kutabpur.

Travelling by train, I got down at Chuyadanga Railway Station in order to go to Kutabpur. I noticed two other *Sanyasins* also getting down along with me from the train. I suspected them to be pilgrims to Kutabpur. They were in search of a Coolie (porter) and none was available on the platform. Casually, I came to their rescue and volunteered to carry their luggages to the bus. I also boarded the same bus along with them. Of the two, the senior *Sanyasin* asked me, “Who will pay your bus fare?” “*Malik* alone, Sir.”, I replied. The *Sadhu*jee then kept quiet.

We got down at Mihirpur. When the bus Conductor asked for the fare, I pointed out my *Sanyasin Malik* to him. The senior Maharaj expressed his indignation for me. At this I snapped. “When I carried your suitcase from the station, didn’t you assume your bosshood?” Surprised by the reply most unwillingly one of them paid my bus fare, but they refrained from talking to me out of anger.

By then I was feeling very hungry. With a little drift of emotion, I played one of my monkey tricks. I said, “Maharaj, I am feeling awfully hungry. May I have your permission to get some sweets for us from the nearby shop?” “No, no, we don’t need any” was his reply. But without heeding, I went to the sweet stall and brought a seer of sweets and asked the sales boy in the shop to collect the money from the two *Sanyasins*. I brought the sweets and requested them to eat. They, however, declined my offer. Thereafter, I ate one after the other and exhausted the stock. When the shopkeeper came and demanded the money, I directed him towards the senior Maharaj. The two *Sadhus* got wild with me. Finding no way out, they paid the cost of the sweets in full.

By that time a boat arrived at the ghat. We all boarded it and took our seats. After the boat set off the shore there were signs of an imminent storm. The black clouds had moved low. The gale was high. The boatman was struggling to lower the sails but, lo, within minutes the storm took a momentum. The boat began to drift and it was on the verge of sinking. The *Sanyasins* were already restless. After all there was no way out. Like other passengers, they were also terribly alarmed. Realising the gravity of the situation, when they were waiting, as if, for the disaster, I volunteered to say, "If I am ordered, I can instantly stabilise the boat. With a hurried and panting SOS tone, the senior *Sanyasin* cried, "Dear brother, please try, if there is any way out." I had a hearty laugh and while laughing I dealt a slap to the boatman and quickly loosened the noose of the sails and pulled down the rope. With the sails withdrawn, the drifting stopped and the boat got steady. The lives were saved, and for the rest of the time, I helped others in draining the water from the boat.

Late in the afternoon, we arrived at the village Kutabpur, our holy *Gurudham*. I was very much pleased to witness a large gathering of my co-disciples—both *sanyasins* and family men and women. We partook of *Prasad* (food offered to God or *Gurudev*) during the night.

Elabrate arrangements had been made to observe the birth anniversary of Sri Sri Thakur. On the *Jhulan Poornima* day, *Prayer, Pooja, Hawan* and chantings were performed near the shrine of Sri Sri Thakur. When the *Sanyasins* were invited to pay their respects to *Bhog* offered near the shrine, I accompanied them and prostrated myself in reverence. Chidananda Jee, unfortunately, could not attend this anniversary event that year. I certainly felt disappointed because it was or consulting with him I came all the way here.

For offering as '*Bhog*' *Khichuri* had been prepared mixed with black gram. The senior *Sanyasin*, whom I have already referred to, commented, "What!, more than a thousand rupees must have been collected as subscription for the function, why then do we have such inferior stuff for '*Bhog*'?" His protest was vehement and he announced to quit without even eating. There was a bit of commotion on the spot, I soon intervened and requested every one to partake of the *Prasad* postponing futile arguments until the afternoon. This appeared to work and a large number of people were fed. I too had my share with everyone else. But the *Sanyasin*, who was unhappy with the quality of *Bhog* was still starving.

Later in the evening the local organisers came and coaxed the *Sanyasin* with folded hands and apologised for the lapses, but all in vain. Everyone was sorry for this incidence. I was already at the limit of my patience. I just told the organisers, "Why at all do you feel penitant? Why should you have to request anyone to oblige you? A true disciple can never disrespect *Bhog*, the stuff that has already been offered to Sri Sri Thakur. That is indeed '*ambrosia*' for a disciple worth the name. The organisers were waiting, and encouraged by my remarks, they then made the formal request for the last time. The *Sanyasin* cast an angry look at me and after a while announced that he would have a morsel of the *Prasad*. This, after all, pleased the organisers, who then partook of the *Prasad* along with the *Sanyasin*.

On the day following the anniversary function, as was customary on the concluding phase of all religious festivals in East Bengal, '*Kardam Khela*' (scating barefoot on mud with slips and falls) was arranged. There was mutual hit and push resulting in slip-falls over long distances on the muddy surface. Although trifle dirty, it was fun one likes to enjoy amidst

loving co-disciples. In the afternoon we were invited by the students of Nigamananda High School to witness their magic show which we all enjoyed.

The next day we took leave of the holy *Gurudham* at Kutabpur and accompanying the other *Sadhus* I came to the Daskhin Bangala *Saswat Ashram* located at Halisahar and visited the *Samadhi* (Shrine) of Sri Sri Thakur. From there I came to Garbeta where Sri Chandra Sekhar Rana, the worthy disciple of Sri Sri Thakur played my host. While on an evening stroll, I came by the local Ramakrishna Mission *Ashram*. I thought it advisable to visit the *Ashram* and discuss with the *Sadhus* with regard to their spiritual experiences and thereby clarify my own doubts. I went to the *Ashram* and found that the evening prayer was going on. I joined with the group in the evening 'Keertan' and partook of some *Prasad*.

Thereafter, I noticed the *Sadhus* started discussing on matters related to agriculture and other allied business. I was at the limit of my patience. Soon I became very wild and getting out of the hall, screamed, "will you continue to be haunted by the ghost of mundane business eh? May I help you to get rid of it? I came here thinking it to be an *Ashram* founded by a great master, so that I may hear about his life and messages. But what am I observing here?"

Noticing my fury, the older *Sanyasin* said, "We are sorry, my young friend, please proceed ahead to my living room, we will soon chat on matters of your interest!" Gladly I obeyed him and entering his living room I waited for his arrival. He came there after a short while and began saying sweetly, "Look, I am not an adept myself. Vivekananda, used to visit our home and recount his spiritual experiences and realisations. He used to tell me in details, how, due solely to the blessings of Sri Sri Ramakrishna Dev, he received the

mercy of the Divine Mother." I was listening to his discourses with very great interest. Continuing he told "Experiences pertaining to lower stages of '*Sadhana*' could be communicated by words and similies but the attainments at the higher levels have to be realised first-hand and contemplated upon." I was getting convinced and encouraged as he explained to me at length the various facets of an aspirant's problems and prospects and expressing my gratefulness I told, "Sir, I have been amply benefited by your talk and with all my doubts now having been cleared, my faith in the spiritual path has been restored and reinforced."

Finally, I greeted the *Sanyasin* reverentially saying, "Maharaj, kindly forgive me; notwithstanding my harsh and unseemly words, the peace and happiness you have caused to me by your kind discourse cannot be measured and expressed by words. There has been an end to my mental strife, and hopefully, no more beating the air."



Miracles

Dispelling all my doubts and eliminating all misconceptions with regard to the spiritual basis of my experiences gained over the past few months, when I returned to my maternal aunt I witnessed another dimension of her miraculous personality. I was told that after I had left her, the villagers approached and requested her to perform some miraculous acts that she had been doing for me in the past. Her reply had been "Bholanath survived because he was a *Sadhu*, if ordinary folks witness those, it may cost their lives ! Persisting with their demand, they said, "you have to demonstrate your powers to us. We wish to observe that even at the risk of life. Aunt cautioned them saying, "If you are so particular, you can realise by touching my feet with your hand; however, immediately thereafter you shall perish !" Foolishly curious as they were, one by one touched her feet and dropped like dead.

The number of persons both men and women who dared perform this experiment were sixteen in all. The rest of those who were witnessing this got terribly afraid and did not venture to come near her but stood at a comfortable distance ! They started discussing among themselves as to the next course of action. It was decided to report the matter at the Police-Station. Two of them rushed ahead but to get to the Police-Station a river had to be crossed. Water was only waist-deep. While they were wading through the water, a voice, as if, from the blue, was heard "you fools, could not she bring them back to life, if you propitiate and request the divine Mother (who apparently had been possessing my aunt) ! How could the dead get their lives if you go to the Police-Station ? Can

the Inspector restore life ?" Both of them ~~had~~ heard the same thing and hurriedly returned to the village and narrated to the people what they had heard in the mid-river. The elderly ones had collected themselves and made all arrangements for the *Pooja* of the Mother.

With folded hands they ~~had~~ said, "Mother, be merciful and restore the lives of your children !"

Aunt replied, "Well, I might do that not touching them myself. Then she just kept quiet. After a short while a *Mahata* (tribal) girl appeared in the scene. She appeared to have been possessed by some spirit. She kept shouting, "I am '*Kali*', I have come here to bring you back to life." She beat each one with a stick and one by one regained consciousness as, if, waking up from a slumber. Thus, my aunt's fame had spread far and wide and people had started literally worshipping her as a Goddess.

When I arrived at the village I noticed that about three to four hundred people were visiting my aunt every day. Most of them suffered from some disease or the other. They assembled there to get themselves cured by her healing touch. The same *Mahata* Girl used to pass her foot on the patients as a remedial measure. A dog lay starving in front of the house of my aunt. Witnessing all these, I told aunt that I was not going to be lured by these feats—the goal of my life was to realise the spiritual truth.

Disregarding my preferences, she just announced, "I am going to float on water tomorrow. "The news spread like wild fire. The next morning the villagers accompanied aunt to the tank, as if, in a ceremonial parade. A crowd of two to three hundred people had already collected at the site. Aunt sat

on the *Ghat* and while applying oil on her feet told me, "Look, when I enter into the water all these people will also enter following me." To my utter surprise, as she slowly entered into the water, all the people there also moved slowly into the tank and when aunt stopped, they too stood at knee deep water.

"Enough of it," I thought, "if the process continued, the people would not be able to survive." At that time one of the spectators, seemingly crazy, suggested to aunt, "Oh? no, you do not have to move any further, I will float myself." Soon he entered into the water and crossed the tank from one side to the other. The villagers then returned home along with aunt. I followed her and the whole incident appeared incredibly berserk!

At this time, I noticed that aunt was driving men and women like machine. I used to wonder as to how she was able to do that. Feeling greatly puzzled I once told her, "O, mother! I have witnessed enough of astonishing powers in your possession. You are able to perform many a miracle, but may I be able to behold your benign form as it really is?"

"If I stop my miraculous activities then the people will fall on you and torture you," she replied. A carefree spirit in me retorted, "Whatever the consequences, please, let me have your merciful good-self back again." "Alright, that will be done," aunt consented.

This I considered, was an achievement on my part, as I could be able to persuade her to act as I wished. But I was surprised soon to observe that people stopped coming to my aunt's house. From some sources I came to know that the villagers were seriously holding group discussions and that I am the focuss of that. Someone was heard saying that my presence

in the village is the root cause of all the misfortune. Someone else commented that I was the agent to turn aunt mad and I should better have been confined in a mental hospital.

Once some of them indeed were over-taken by great fury and entering into the house, physically assaulted me. They drove me out of the house. I felt greatly perturbed, the expression on my face was nothing but contempt, but it soon melted away. I exercised some discretion, the equipoise expected of a *Brahmachari*. The slight injury I received, also taught me how to put up with danger and how to endure suffering. Before long I realised what my aunt had foretold me.

A while later the village cobbler rushed in to assault me with a *lathi*. Fortunately before any harm was done, my aunt came to my rescue and shouted, "What nonsense is going on here, eh?" On seeing aunt, the miscreants quit the place. When I entered the house, aunt told me that they would kill me if I continued to stay in the village any longer. She proposed to leave and get away somewhere else but where? I suggested, 'Why not we go and visit Khadkuma *Ashram* itself?'

She agreed and summoned some of the poor people from the village and distributed among them whatever rice or clothing was there in the house. I just got curious to know why she was doing like that. She said, "Otherwise all that would get stolen in no time. In reality, I am not the true owner of these materials. Moreover, to be able to donate to the needy is truly divine. It is said that he who can donate is indeed a miser and doesn't one get back because he donates? How can you get unless you donate?" The common folks, however, branded this as an act of madness. They said, "Look, she doesn't even bother of what she would eat tomorrow."

On the following day aunt left the place with her sons and daughters in a bullock cart. I accompanied her. The eldest son preferred to return half way. We spent a night at Jodada in her sister's house. The next day we were to go to Bankura by bus. The bus stand was a mile away from the house. While we were on our way to the bus stand, a bus left within our sight. I commented, "what use is there proceeding further now that the bus has left? we have to walk another half a mile; why trouble ourselves for nothing"?

My aunt took exception saying, "You fool, unless I go there, will the bus be able to move? If it has already gone, it is sure to stop for us wherever it now is." Reassured thus we sort of marched on. True to her prediction the bus which had by then left the place, suddenly stopped at some distance. We went there and took our seats in the bus. Just then aunt said, "so long as I don't get down from the bus, it can't move." With these words she got down from the bus. The bus then got started. The passengers were surprised at this.

However, the driver said, "My bus has started of its own, and how does it matter whether you be in the bus or outside? Aunt replied, "well then, I command the bus not to start and let me see how you get it started"? No sooner she completed her statement than the bus came to a dead stop. The driver was dumbfounded. He came out of the bus and with folded hands paid respects to aunt and said, "Mother, I have not been able to recognise you. Your orders are binding on all and for ever. The passengers were amazed by this incident.

The bus brought us upto Bankura and therefrom continuing our journey by train we reached Garabeta at about the midday. We stayed with my co-disciple Sri Chandra Sekhar Rana. After taking food and some rest, we left for Khadkusma

by bullock cart at about 10 p m, It was a rainy night and the journey was on a country road. Aunt and the children sat in the cart, the cartman walked in front with me following behind it. After Amalagoda, we entered the forest.

It was a thick forest and the moon was intermittently peeping through the clouds. As we entered deep inside crossing the shadows of giant trees, the sibilant of insects and the dull crackling sound of the bullock cart were the only sonorous companions. The cartman suddenly noticed a tiger sitting on the road. The bullocks being already terrified, were unwilling to move further. They were pushing and fuming to get out of the yoke. The cartman who was walking in front of the cart, the likely first victim of the charge yelled, "O Dada, I am finished." He then leaped into the cart in great terror. "What has happened" I asked him. Stammeringly he replied, "Look ahead what is seated on the midroad ! None can save us now from its clutches."

I noticed a big tiger sitting majestically on the road. I saw the crooks of its eyebrows and the corners of its mouth, and wetting of the lips with its tongue. I thought either the cartman or one of the bullocks might fall a pray. It was nearing mid-night and in that lonely wilderness the confrontation made my finer ear catch the throb of my own heart beat. I whispered into the ears of my aunt, "Instead of allowing the helpless cartman and the innocent bullock into the jaws of the tiger let me sacrifice myself.

'Go ahead," aunt suggested.

I went in front of the cart and stood there for about four to five minutes. I gazed at it. It was a penetrating and steadfast gaze. I remained fixed with my determination. The tiger was also sitting on the road perhaps lying in wait for me. Propelled by a thrill of internal joy, I proceeded leaping towards the

tiger and reached almost a few feet from it. To my utter surprise I noticed the tiger slowly walking away into the forest. I then asked the cartman, since the tiger had already left the place, to resume the drive. The cart moved on and by about dawn we reached the *Ashram*.

Chandi'da (Chandi Chaitanya Brahmachari) was then in charge of the *Ashram*. I informed him that my maternal aunt had come to visit the *Ashram*. She had been a realised soul and a godly woman. By living with her, I had a first hand experience of her divine personality, and her blessings. If she stayed at the *Ashram*, it would be beneficial to the inmates and the aspirants would achieve quick progress in the spiritual path. Only true *Sadhus* could understand and regard her, the ordinary folks cannot. Unfortunately, Chandi'da couldn't appreciate the idea and bluntly replied that women are prohibited from staying in the *Ashram*.

I felt well-nigh insulted, but aunt, as usual, took it as a matter of course. She understood what Chandi'da meant, and said, "I have no plans to stay in your *Ashram* for ever." Some one else is soon coming to invite me to stay elsewhere!" True to her words, one Shri Sudhir Ghose of Ausabandi, a village three miles away from the *Ashram*, arrived with a bullock cart sometime later. He greeted aunt and requested her to kindly accompany him to his house. Aunt willing, we just left the *Ashram* and were taken to Mr. Ghosh's house.

Sudhir's uncle was sick from burning sensation in his head and required repeated bathing with cold water. Aunt went near the patient and moved her palms on his head for a while. That gave a soothing effect and the patient felt some relief. Application of cold water-bath was no longer necessary. We stayed there for a week. One day aunt told me, "Listen,

this patient will not survive any longer. Since his two daughters (whose mother had been dead already) are very much attached to him, his life cannot part with !"

She then sent for the daughters and said, "My dears, your father is not going to live longer. He will pass away peacefully if you could slacken your attachment for him. His health has deteriorated and he is a burden on you all. Why are you trying to bind him down to this ephemeral world ? Your mother too died one day. Can your father remain alive for ever ?"

Listening thus from aunt, the daughters started crying in anguish. But soon aunt consoled them saying, "Look, when your father dies, he will go and stay with your mother. If you want to see your mother, I can make her appear before you. You can notice your father departing with her. Would you now allow your father leave you ?" The daughters, now intensely curious, asked aunt, "Can we indeed see our mother ?" "Yes" was her assured reply. The daughters were excited at the prospect of meeting their mother and waited for the cardinal hour.

My aunt and myself with the two daughters were sitting in the room where the patient lay on the bed. Aunt said, "Listen, your mother will appear wearing the same red sari she had been clad when she was taken to the crematorium." She then asked me to keep hold of the patient steadily; otherwise he might stand up, try to walk and in the process will his life fly away. Just about two minutes after, I noticed, their mother standing near the door. The daughters, perhaps noticing this, got frightened and lost their consciousness. On the other hand, the patient, became excited and tried to get up, but I had to force him lie down as instructed. The daughters were brought back to consciousness by sprinkling some

water on their face. Thereafter aunt asked the other members of the family to arrange flowers, sandal paste, etc. and to start reading the '*Geeta*' and *Bhagabat puran* (sacred scriptures) as is customarily done at the death bed. She declared that the patient would die at eight the following morning. The death did occur at the time predicted.

During our stay at Sri Ghosh's residence, there occurred a funny sort of incident highlighted by another miracle performed by aunt. A few snake charmers were attempting to catch a snake in the vicinity but the reptile escaped and rushed into the house. Aunt was sitting near the main entrance and there were several others listening to her discourse. No one appeared to be aware that the snake had entered. I was sitting just a few yards away. The snake-charmers came running to the house and complained, "Well, our snake has entered into this house. We will get inside and collect it."

Aunt replied, "Why, as you are my children, so is the snake. It is afraid of you because you may catch and torture it. It has come to me for shelter. How can I permit you to catch it?"

This was quite unpleasant for the charmers who sharply threatened aunt saying, "Well, we know how to retaliate and will see how you can retain our snake ! We will set free all the snakes we have right nearby your house and see how you entertain them ?"

"Very well said, then leave all of them here. All will stay with me." smilingly aunt replied.

That added fuel to the fire and the charmers let nearly ten apparently venomous snakes off their boxes. But what a sight ! The snakes lined up and inter-twined among themselves and did not move an inch from the place they were released.

The snake charmers were mortally afraid at this incredible behaviour of the reptiles. They openly admitted their defeat, collected their snakes back in the boxes and forthwith left the place.

Asked about the snakes that had entered the house, aunt said, "Don't worry about it, it has already left and gone." True as her words always were, there was no trace of it in the house even after a thorough search !

We stayed for about a month in the residence of Sri Ghose. Aunt then desired to move out. I asked her, "Where now ? Is there any known person nearby ?"

"At the appropriate time some one will come and invite me." she said. Continuing she remarked, "What makes you impatient ? And are not you a *Sadhu*—why in anxiety then? I am guiding the course of events all right !"

As it had been in the past, so was it then. A person named Gopi Patra of village Pathartodia came to invite us to live in his house. Entreatingly he said, "Mother, kindly step into our house and live with us. That will be auspicious enough." Aunt gave her consent and we all went to his house. There too aunt continued to perform some miracles. In the evening hours, Patra had the vision of whichever deity he preferred due to aunt's grace. *Namsankeertan* (chanting) was going on unabated.

Soon the little kids were getting charmed by the vibrations of chanting and seemed to remain in deep trance (samadhi). A local *Brahmin*, who had no faith in spiritual powers and the effect of devotion to deities, wanted to test the genuineness of the kids hypnotised by the effect of chanting and prayer. One day he stealthily brought a piece of burning stick in contact with the body of one who had been meditating.

Little injury could be done to the kid but amazingly enough this man himself cried and yelled due to severe burning pain in his body when he returned home.

People came to know of the sad plight of the mischief maker. The fellow eventually repented for his action crying aloud, "I am a sinner; I have caused injury to the devout!" I cannot have peace unless the Mother (aunt) cures me by her healing touch. My entire body is burning ceaselessly."

This *Brahmin's* wife, children and other well-wishers approached aunt with folded hands and begged her mercy on behalf of this poor man. Expressing her displeasure, aunt reproached, "These little kids came to me for love and enlightenment and this saddist fool tries to harm them by burning! I will see how long can he continue with his dirty act!" One and all prayed aunt to relent! I also pleaded coaxingly, "Aunt! this *Brahmin* seems to be an idiot! Unless you touch him by moving your palm on his body, he can't be saved."

She then took pity on the *Brahmin* and cured him by her healing touch. At this time, aunt used to perform many a feat which I had the opportunity of witnessing from close quarters. I had no will or direction of my own. The strength of her personality had overpowered mine almost entirely. I was only a satellite and behaved without much commonsense or tact as the following incident would prove.

One other *Brahmin* of the village approached me one day and expecting me or my aunt perform some miracle for alleviating his misery, said, "Baba, I am finished. For the last six months I am not getting food to eat." "Why"? I asked.

He replied, "By worshipping *Lord Shiva* in the temple for the devotees I used to earn my livelihood. A number of

chronic patients used to come and hang on in the temple and propitiate *Lord Shiva* to attract his blessings. I was getting my '*Dakshina*' (fees) for worshipping on their behalf. Now things have come to a standstill. *Lord Shiva* appears either to have lost his powers or is in deep slumber. Kindly help me arouse the deity, otherwise, my family will be starving." I casually told him, "Tomorrow I will find out what can be done. Unless he provides you food, why should he retain his title of '*Mahadeva*' (God the great.) ?

The next day, I went to the temple and noticed a huge *Shiva Lingam* (an egg shaped statue). The poor *Brahmin's* plight had touched me and, as if, under a spell of emotion I shouted, "Well, till recently you have been receiving the *Pooja* from the *brahmin*, and now if you stop his food, how is he going to live ? His family will starve to death. I am not sparing you until you make some arrangements for them." With these words, I dealt a few kicks to the *Lingam*. Moments later, a local *Brahmin* appeared all of a sudden on the spot and witnessed my excitement and defiling action. He soon convened a meeting of the other *brahmins* and *pundits* and solicited their advice for the performance of purificatory rites.

The next morning many *brahmins*, *pundits* and other local people assembled *Abhishek* (bathing and ablution) *Pooja* and prayers were held. Lo, by the evening time six patients did arrive planning to undertake penance. The joy of the priest of the temple knew no bounds. He came running

to me and coaxed "Bata, kindly go again and kick the *Shiva Lingam* as you had done. My good days have returned. Six persons have turned up already to the temple for continual worship. Would you kindly do the favour again?"

It was a nice piece of humour ! I dismissed him saying, "Look, by kicking once, the sleeping deity has been awakened. If I repeat the action he may turn furious. You have no longer to worry. Once aroused, *Lord Shiva* will continue to be awake for ever !"



The Transition

Few days later, we left Pathartodia for Dhanyachoda village where we stayed for nearly fifteen days. One day my young cousin, 'Bhandi' asked, "Dada, could you massage my legs for a moment?" Gladly I agreed and gently pressed her tender legs. Just then aunt appeared there and said, "Alas, what have you done? You have massaged the legs of this kid? She will no longer survive!" At this the little girl heartily laughed. I tried to collect my thoughts in an attempt to identify my faults but the jolt of her statement lingered on. Soon afterwards, aunt desired to return to Maheshpur.

A day before our return journey, I went to *Ashram* to see my spiritual brothers and told them that I would go back to Maheshpur with my aunt. But, lo ! Instead of farewell wishes given to me, strangely enough, the blanket, a small brass pot and other articles that were given to me for my personal use when I had joined the *Ashram*, were snatched away. I didn't raise a finger, but gladly parted with them. "You can't take away Sri Sri Thakur from me, can you? So long as Sri Sri Thakur is with me, I will get plenty of blankets. Good bye,"—with this remark I came back to Dhanyachoda.

We had no money with us, nor we were bothered about it. We had to board the train without ticket. At Chatna railway station, the Ticket Inspector detained us. Aunt said, "Let us go, not by train, but by hiring a bullock cart." I was struck with surprise. It was what hope had needed. Maheshpur was nearly forty kilometers away ! Where would we stay with the children and who would help us reach there ? Quick did she read my mind and snapped, "Being a *Brahmachari*, you have been following me. Won't then the worldly

beings care for me ? What for am I a Mother ? All are bound to follow me and also help me. You just watch how I am going to arrange a bullock-cart in the nearby village."

Reaching the village, aunt enquired of the availability of cart on hire. The villagers directed us to go to the Muslim *Basti* (colony). We went there and at the invitation of the mother, a cartman came forward and gladly agreed to take us in his cart. Aunt made it very clear to him saying, "Look, we have neither money nor food with us. Could you, driving your cart, leave us at Maheshpur" ? The cartman encouragingly said, "When Mother is with me what else do I require ? I will be able to help you reach your house." We got into his bullock cart. It was already night time and the road was rough. We reached Maheshpur at four in the afternoon the following day.

On entering the village accidentally I saw the woman who used to sell puffed rice and was a devotee of the Mother. She asked me to get down from the cart and when I complied, coming close by, she whispered, "Let aunt and the children go home; you better stay with us in our house for the night. The *brahmins* have already sensed your reappearance in the village and have plotted to kill you. Therefore, I cannot allow you to go with your aunt. I will send my sons along with her so that they will guard her against any possible hassle with the villagers."

As I hadn't taken any food during the day, she served me with *Chuta* (pressed rice) for refreshment. Later in the evening she helped me to cook my own food. Aunt and her children went home accompanied by the elderly sons and other relatives of this woman. They publicly pronounced in the village that if anyone does any harm to the *Sadhu*, his aunt or the children, they would be dealt with evenly. The *brahmins* were fully aware of the might and courage of these young men and so they didn't dare to do anything that night.

In the meantime, my aunt borrowed Rs. 6/- from someone and paid the hire charges to the cartman. Aunt also gave him some food and thanked him for his help. Happily he went back. I returned to my aunt after two days. The *brahmins* had been revolting against me and aunt apparently to avenge of the incident in which the *Mahata* girl bet the unconscious people including the *brahmins* to revive them. That, they considered was an act of humiliation for them.

There had been propaganda and agitation to suitably punish one who has been the apparent cause of this disgraceful act. When they learned that I had come back they turned wild. They did not dare grudge against aunt. They openly told aunt, "We have nothing against you. We feel very much insulted to find *Brahmachari* Bholanath stay with you. If you allow him to stay here any longer, we will not spare you either."

"Look, I can't ask him to quit. He may go away any day he likes or stay here if he so desires," aunt replied.

"We willn't come to your house any more" they announced.

Soon followed an exchange of hot words and they hated to look at me. They not only spoke ill of me, but called names using filthy language. I was patiently bearing the brunt. Barring the *brahmins*, all others liked us. At that time, I was experiencing a thrill of pleasure deep in my heart and there was an inner calm despite the wild disturbances outside. As a consequence, I cared little for the scandals and rumours spread by the *brahmins*. I considered that it would not be proper for me to quit aunt and the young children especially when there was none other to look after.

By the by, I discovered that there was hardly three quintals of rice left for us. There were still sometime before harvest. This little quantity of rice, however, provided enough food for all

of us and I felt, as if, the stock would never get exhausted. We harvested our paddy crop around November. How I wished to live peacefully without having to wrangle with the dastardly elements in the village villifying the decent people ! Strange enough, however, have been their designs and movements !

It was one of the fateful nights during the *Kali Pooja* season. Bhandi passed quite a bit of urine white in colour and dense like syrup. Noticing this, aunt exclaimed. "Ah, how abnormal ! Her end is indeed drawing near !" Before aunt could finish her statement she breathed her last and fell dead on her lap.

With the untimely and unnatural death of my cousin Bhandi, possibly a four year old incarnate of some Goddess, her soul must have returned to the celestial abode. But even at present, after nearly fifty years, despite me being an ascetic the memory of her mysterious manners and her role in my spiritual aspirations fill me up with reverence. She was the catalyser of my efforts for having the vision of the divine Mother. I never even dreamed that she would pass away at such a tender age. I was visibly shocked. Aunt sensed my uneasiness and consoled me one day telling that Bhandi's spirit was still guiding me to an ever auspicious and wholesome state of life.

Bhandi's demise was of little consequence to aunt. She continued to be calm and composed as usual. On the contrary, she said, "What is there to lament about her ? She is always with me in a subtle form. She lived and acted in her physical form for as many days as was necessary. Since there was no further need now, she left her body. Why remorse then ?" I was surprised to notice a mother so much detached to life in the world.

Following Bhandi's death the *brahmins* from all over the village gathered at our house and helped us perform the rites. Their visit didn't disturb me at all. Their occasional slanderous remarks had no effect on me ; I had trained up myself to bear all this with equanimity and remain entirely unconcerned. I had been trying to be a stoic. I must admit that I was not a phlegmatic or an adamant character to begin with. No doubt I was physically strong and indefatigable and with confidence and determination I managed to discharge my duties however arduous they might be. I had a natural inclination for asceticism and truthful living, but I must admit that even having been initiated as a *Brahmachari*, I had not yet overcome the many pitfalls of life.

It required tremendous efforts on my part for self analysis and reproach in light of the guidance I had been receiving earlier from Chidanandajee and presently from my aunt. To begin with, I was like any other worldly creature, with all the care and concern built into the system. In fact, an incident that occurred during this period, although trivial, should be narrated here as an evidence of my momentary defeatist attitude for life !

Once I was attacked by a severe form of dysentery. Despite all treatment the sickness continued. I was bedridden for a period of three months. Once I got up at midnight, but felt too weak to walk upto the latrine. My clothes were soiled with urine and stool. I cursed myself for this miserable plight of mine. My mental strength was at the lowest ebb. I thought it better to leave the household and keep lying in the field outside till death. 'What use is there to survive with a broken health - a state of helplessness and ennui ?'

Completely disgusted I left the house at mid-night without informing anybody. I went to the forest and lay there in a pit

out of a sense of disgust and self immolation. I said to myself, 'now deficate as much as you like ; and I am not going to get up from here.' The night ended, the sun was up. It was getting 4 p.m. in the afternoon.

At home my aunt and the children got worried due to my absence. Soon people around came to know about it. Incidentally, some women had been to the forest and noticed me lying in the pit. I heard them talk, "Certainly some one lay dead in the pit." The news quickly spread in the village and many came in search of me. I just thought 'neither did I get motion nor death. What use then continuing to be here ?' I got up and walked to the river. While having a wash my own relatives came along to the *ghat* and were very much comforted to find me. It was sheer chance that after this incident my ailment was gradually cured, but the weakness continued for quite sometime.

While convalescing, I discovered that for petty matters, I was overtaken by anger. When children disobeyed me, I used to beat them mercilessly although I had to repent afterwards. On one occasion, I told aunt, "What has happened to me, of late ? Being a *Sadhu*, I have become a slave to anger. I cannot control my excitement on issues which are otherwise trivial !" Aunt suggested, "Why don't you try to identify the origin of anger - how does it arise or disappear ? To be able to remedy the disease one has first to diagnose its cause This method is common to all other enemies, viz, passion, greed, attachment, etc. as well. These cannot be alleviated without first identifying their roots."

Aunt's advice impressed me deeply. I tried to remain conscious whenever some provocation excited me. I tried to analyse the cause and the mode of its rise and fall. After

observing self restraint for sometime, I could identify its seeds, and thereafter my anger automatically lay low and couldn't raise its head any longer. With little practice I could regulate its intensity such that this and the other vices could not enslave me, rather, I myself became their master.

The following year I decided to take full charge of cultivation of lands of my maternal uncle. The children were still too young to manage the affairs. I worked doggedly day in and day out in the fields along with the labourers. Whenever required, I went to the forest, collected fuel by cutting wood. Devoting all my strength and efforts we reaped a rich harvest of paddy that year. This was only for my young cousins. I lived rough so that they should live comfortably. I worked hard, so that they should be above odds. We had little wants left.

I cannot resist my temptations to describe here an interesting episode that occurred when I took up land cultivation. I purchased two hefty giant size bullocks. I was glad that with that pair work in the fields would be accomplished with ease and efficiency. In the morning, when the bullocks were taken to the field with the plough fitted, the two venerable animals lay themselves down on the ground and were not prepared to plough the land. They were motionless, as if struck with senility. I felt helpless and I sat down disappointed keeping my palms on the forehead. I thought that the money invested on them was sheer waste.

'Would the seller take back the bullocks and refund the money? By no means,' I guessed. I narrated the state of affairs to aunt. She said, "The responsibility of cultivation is yours and not mine. You do your duty. The bullocks should perform their's. Why do you drag me into the scene?"

The next morning I went to the fields. The bullocks were yoked and moving my hands on them I addressed, "Listen, no doubt the two of you are being troubled, but don't you see even though a *Sadhu*, I too face a problem. My duty is to bring up the Children by supervising cultivation of land to raise crops. Your duty is to render assistance in the field. If, you become immobile, my efforts would be useless." To my great astonishment, after listening to my advice, the bullocks started walking. After inspecting the ploughing operation for some time, I left the field for some other work.

The labourers later informed me that the moment I left the field the bullocks slept down as they did the day before. So long as I was present, they worked in the field and when I left, they stood still and stopped work. How could then the lands be ploughed? If I had to stay in the field for hours together in the hot sun my health may break down. I again approached my aunt and sought her advice. She said, "Look, you are now enjoying the fruits of your past '*Karma*' (action). The pair of bullocks are also enjoying their's! You again tell them that they should not neglect their duties."

On the next day, I again went to the fields. Ploughing was started in my presence. After a while I spread my napkin on the *bund* and sat down trying to relax a bit. It was necessary because, my presence in the field induced them to work. But seeing me relax on the *bund* the bullocks again stopped and lay down. The plough man behind the pair shouted "Baba, the bullocks have again shirked work."

"Don't beat them, I am going," so saying I went near the animals and told them, "Look here, Baba, it would be wrong on your part not to assist in ploughing the land, so long as I am here. I have not gone away anywhere, but why don't you

work?" As if in response to my request, the animals began to move and resumed ploughing the land. I came to my place and reclined on the *bund*.

After about an hour's ploughing, I had a feeling that the bullocks indeed came near me and said, "Baba, we are very much tired and can walk no more. Please release us. Why do you yoke us for ever and trouble us?" I asked them, "Whether do I trouble you or I trouble myself?" Being a *Babaji* (Monk), it has become my lot to tie myself down to farming in order to enjoy the fruits of my past *Karma*. Why do you harass the *Babaji* so much? Please carry on, neither you have any escape from ploughing nor have I any relief from supervising cultivation." Hearing this they assured, "All right Baba, we will cultivate the land hence-forward. You needn't have to wait at the field any longer."

I got up, as if, by an alarm, and went upto the bullocks and by gentle push roused them up from the ground. They got up and started ploughing the land. Since then they were engaged in all sorts of work—ploughing and pulling the cart most satisfactorily. True to their words, they never made me wait at the field any further. I breathed a sigh of relief and thanked my stars for my success at farming business.

Suddenly a *Sadhu* appeared on the scene from somewhere. He was reputed for the knack of telling the past and predicting the future events. I met him. He talked through signs and gestures expressing the idea that a terrible storm was coming, the house would be blown off.

"If that happened a new one ^{would} ~~will~~ be constructed." I said.

"I won't allow the *Sadhu's* house to be broken," the stranger added.

"He who can forecast the storm, can't he save me from the disaster ? However, I have nothing to lose or to gain !" I commented

Thereafter the *Sadhujee* came along with me to our house. I told aunt. "Mother, a big storm is imminent, and it will destroy our house."

She replied, "The two of you are like brothers. Do whatever you consider to be the best. To me it matters little !"

The *Sadhujee* then wanted to pass on some tips for me : "At the time of the storm, if one can shut ones eyes and lie down on the ground, it willn't cause any damage and will pass off over ground," said he.

"You may come and do all that if you so like". I suggested. (I meant that I have no independent will of my own. I depend entirely on *Gurudev* and may his will be fulfilled !) Consenting silently the *Sadhujee* departed.

About a month later, a meeting of the *brahmins* was convened for devising ways and means of punishing me in public ! The leaders proposed that all concerned should march in a body upto our house, slay me into pieces and throw into the river. Those who responded to the call got enraged and ran about for collecting sharp weapons—billhook, dagger and the like. Right at this moment my familiar *Mahata* woman fast came and began to weep before me.

"What has happened to you ?" I enquired.

Sobbing intensely, she said, "You are in terrible danger. A group of people are coming along to kill you. Instantly, you run away to save your life."

Without any sign of anxiety, quickly I remarked, "You better quit this place at once, lest they could know that you have been here to inform me."

After she left the place, I could recall the prediction made by the *Sadhujee* few days ago. Soon I pulled myself up and decided to face any eventuality with courage and equanimity. I knew that I have been honest and candid and have not caused any harm to anyone.

Aunt was then frying rice in the kitchen. At this moment several people with weapons surrounded our house. However, I remained calm and composed - not a chill of fear upon me while the loud voice of the miscreants came from all over. A dozen of them thronged at our main door, shouting all the while, "Drag the bugger out of the house and kill him."

Intrepid I went along asking, "What all do you want here?" Point blank they commanded, come out, you scoundrel. By then I was already approaching them bold and fearless. They encircled me and shouted, slay, kill him and finish. With a tone filled with confidence but humility I announced, "If it would be of any use to any one of you, do surely kill me. Why so much of clamour about this? May I invite you, my dear friends, to cut me into pieces and have your desire fulfilled!"

One of them shouted, "Let me chop off his legs;" and a second man cried "Why don't you cut off his hands?"

I wanted to surrender completely as had been advised by the *Sadhujee* who made the forecast. I stretched out my hands asking them to do whatsoever they liked to. Finally, I stood there bending my head before them. But lo, the impossible was to happen! Mercy of my *Gurudev* started to flow

in abundance! The gangsters threw away their weapons and fell flat on the ground saying, "Baba, we are terrible sinners—we have tortured you like heartless brutes. Be merciful and pardon us. We realise our greivous fault."

I could not believe my eyes and ears—a sudden and unexpected change had taken place transforming the scene from horror to one of hilarity ! The storm was replaced by a lull and provocations melting down as penitance. I lifted each of them from the ground and held in my bosom. I consoled them saying that none of you was at fault. It was a severe test for me, ordained by my *Gurudev*. I had had previous indications about this ! Hearing these comforting words, they left our house with remorse. A little later my aunt came out and asked me as to what had been going on ! I told her that the villagers come there to assault me. With a fanciful smile she quit the place without any comment.



From Darkness to Light

Days rolled by, while the mind was roaming yonder the sky. There were moments which drew heavy on the mind and yet others were frivolous and vacant. The purpose for which I was born into this world, and the quest which made me hunt the *Ashrams* where ascetics lived, seemed to remain unfulfilled. There were periods that did appear to be peaceful and blissful but these did not last long. I was imagining that a given state of mind may continue to represent the cherished goal but that turned out to be a mirage and once again I started wondering if I did tread the right path.

At a distant future point I could realise that the manifestation of divinity as "the Mother principle" that I had met in my aunt, no doubt, had helped create a spiritual centre in my mind such that I could stick on and reflect upon. Not only this centre could help arouse my dormant inquisitive mind and increase its sensitivity but also it provided inspiration to explore further into unknown realms and states of consciousness. However, there were pitfalls and temptations due to '*Maya*' or mundane currents. I couldn't, thus, free myself from the baser forces of the lower spheres so as to remain entirely detached and independent of the eddies. It was quite natural that aunt was not an adept or a 'Master' of spiritual sciences--She had attained a superior psychic state through divine grace and her past "*Samskars*" (hidden impressions). Her body had become a befitting medium for the interplay of the supernatural forces. As a consequence, her third eye (spiritual insight, sixth sense) had been opened and centering round her a number of incidents apparently miraculous occurred.

She was even able to regulate or ordain these events through her will power. She almost completely overpowered my impressionable and delinquent character which was yet to get steady in the spiritual path. However, she was unable to explain to me or convince me as regards the cause and consequence of what was happening around her in my presence—which explanation I did need to stabilise my thought process.

After all, she was a female personality and a “mother” both in the worldly and the divine sense. She did not require to perform any prescribed course of spiritual exercise. A spark of grace had caused the spiritual awakening in her but that was per se not enough to enable her to instruct or guide others. That was good only to provide loving inspiration but not the answers to my expostulations. If one is established as the divine Mother in spirit, rarely he/she is required to attain spiritual wisdom and guide others. But there are those who get self realisation (i.e., realising the identity of the individual and the universal self by introspecting on the *Vedantic* truth) and also stabilize themselves by arousing the motherly power through ‘*Yogic*’ practices and meditation can act as Masters, ‘Guides’ or ‘*Gurus*’. But those who like my aunt acquire the blessing as a result of an elevation of consciousness and become saintly in character can even induce an aspirant to a state of temporary bliss from spiritual consciousness but the final goal cannot be reached and total liberation cannot be had without constant introspection, analysis and *yogic* practices under the guidance of an adept spiritual master or ‘*Sadguru*’. Perhaps for this reason aunt one day told me, “Bhola, you now go to Baba “Nandakshepa’s *Ashram* located in the village Pandui. Nandakshepa is a well known Master. He can give you the required guidance for stabilizing yourself.

Aunt’s instructions appeared quite encouraging to me. However, I couldn’t immediately decide the course of action.

I began to reflect upon my past activities and the tortuous course of progress in quest of myself as well as the obstacles faced on the way in trying to attract the grace of the benign Mother. There was no knowing for how long I was destined to move from one *Ashram* to another, and from one 'Master' to the other. However, there is no denying the fact that my stay with aunt did provide me with a fund of experience and faith in the divinity.

"Won't it be possible, to reach the goal if I continued to live with aunt ? Why was I feeling restless ?" I asked myself. However, those rustics and fools in the village are not to be mended easily. For sometime they behave as friends and well-wishers but on a fine morning they turn as scoundrels. They create rumors and develop enmity in no time. Under such circumstances it would not be an easy task to live with aunt any longer. Considering the pros and cons, I decided to leave and one day I set out for village Pandui in search of "Nandakshepa".

On the verandah of the *Ashram* an old man was seated. "Is this the residence of Nandakshepa ?" I asked !

"Yes," he replied.

"Is Kshepajee available in the house ?"

"Yes, please take your seat," he said.

"Where is he ? Could you help me find him ?" I asked.

"Yes, please be seated."

Being in great anxiety to meet Nandakshepa, I had little patience and the stereotyped reply of the old man annoyed me. I lost my temper and yelled, "Will you behave yourself ? One slap on your head and that should be the answer to your lassitude !" But, lo, the guy only had a hearty laugh at my impertinence : I screamed in surprise and talked to myself; "the old man seems to be as good a mad cap as I myself have been !

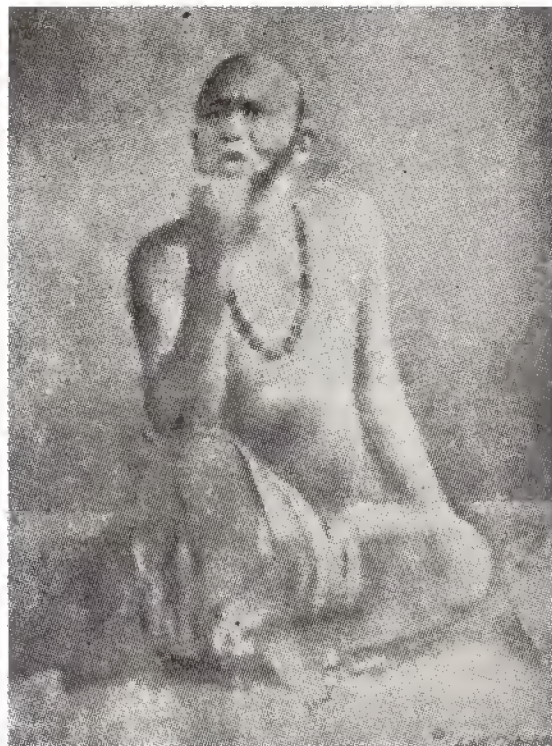
I then entered inside the house and noticed an old woman sleeping. She spared no time in behaving very familiar and asking, "Baba, could you pass on a coin for Kshepa?"

"I have nothing with me," I said. However, as she did not believe, she came up to me and searched my person and dragged me from side to side. That was intolerable for me and I said, "*Betee* ! (young girl) wait, I am going to blast your *Ashram* and help you get rid of your asceticism !

At this stage the old man, still sitting unconcerned, on the verandah, interfered chuckling, "*Pooh, mai* ! (mother) you only asked a coin from him and nothing more valuable. You should know that the visitor is a disciple of Swami Nigamananda. You should have begged of him more precious gifts." I was taken aback at this ! How could this old man know that I was a disciple of Swami Nigamananda ? So, did he know me earlier ?

'Is this old man then Nandakshepa himself ?' So thinking, when I was about to bend myself down to offer my salutations, he caught hold of my hands, and made me sit on his lap. With a tone heavy with complaints and sensitivity of a younger friend I told him, 'Having already attained the comforts of spiritual realisation, how come, Kshepa Baba, you continue to remain blissfully complacent of aspirants like me who feel miserable and stifled ?' He quickly replied, as if he had already read my mind and known the solution, "Can you live in the cave ? You are then sure to attain your goal and get peace." I then anxiously enquired, "Which cave you mean and how to get there ?"

"There is a hillock named Badahutu near Kaida village under Pancha Police Station. I attained *siddhi* (fulfilment)" meditating there," he said.



Sri Sri Nanda Kshepa

I then asked, "How many days shall I have to stay there"?

"Three days would be enough," he said.

"Well, why three days, I am prepared to stay until seven days. But if I didn't get set in peace of mind, I shall come back to suitably deal with you." He again burst into a hearty laugh and bade me farewell while I prostrated before him.

Without further delay, I left the place and first met Zamindar of Kaida village and informed him about my intention of staying in the cave and asked him if he had any objection. He dissuaded me strongly telling that I better stayed in his house rather than in the caves because none returned from the cave alive. "I have not come to stay in your house. I wish to meditate in the cave," I said. "Why need my permission then, go and live there if you please. The hill is not going to crumble on that account" ! he added.

I then set out and climbed up the hill, and after searching for sometime, I could locate the cave as described by Nandakshepa. Owing to the calmness and serenity prevailing all around, my first impression of the cave site was thrilling. My mind was filled with joy and I felt as if drawn into the cave. I did not have any food since the morning and I was so very tired that no sooner I settled down in the cave, the incoming cool breeze lulled me to sleep.

It seemed that I must have remained asleep till 8 p.m. When I woke up I noticed that I was engulfed by the pitch dark interior of the cave; what was I to do then ? I could get out and run away but I had resolved to live there. Moreover, it was pitch dark outside and I was new to the place. I surely felt scared and overpowered by the circumstances. I must have stared blank and strange all around. I thought of the

oddest things and felt so miserable, and deeply fear-stricken with my heart beating and fluttering fast enough. I did not know what really to do.

I was reminded of the warnings of the Zamindar that no one was able to survive in the cave. I began to tremble. I thought as if death was hanging round my neck. At that horrible moment someone from within prompted me, 'isn't your *Guru* present everywhere and even with you here?'

Oh, what a consolation-how much reassuring and invigorating a thought.

Gradually, I regained some confidence. I tried to convince myself, 'My *Guru* must come to my rescue at this critical moment. He has given me that assurance in the past. I started praying Sri Sri Thakur in all my earnestness.

As my prayer got intensified, so was my mental peace, strength, and courage. Fear and insecurity appeared to flee. By dint of whim I just prayed, "Thakur, you have already saved me from the clutches of death. I am still feeling awful in this pitch dark cave. Can't I get some light?"

"Lo, a miracle just happened. As I thought about it, a ray of brilliant light emerged as if from a pin hole in some corner, illumining the entire cave. With the help of that light, I could be able to behold the forest surrounding the cave upto quite some distance. Few moments later I could hear some "*Keertan*" (chanting) as if, done by young boys. 'How could the young boys sing at this hour unless there was a village close by? Why should I then feel myself desolate and depressed?' I asked myself.

Thereafter, I clearly noticed that from a distance, eight young boys with cymbals in hand and singing *Keertan* were

approaching me. They came as far as the entrance of the cave and continued to perform '*Keertan*.' Something more welcome was yet to materialise. A *Sadhu* with a radiant and imposing personality appeared as if from no where reassuring me that even *Sadhus* were also around ! 'Very well, a fortunate scene indeed !' I thought.

Before I had taken a second breath, the *Sadhu*jee entered inside the cave, appeared to come upon me like a wild boar and sat on my chest. His eyes were glowing apparently with a detesting look. I was rather amazed at his attempts to attack me. 'Is this *Sadhu* a *Kapalik* (one who can slay humans to satisfy his goddess) ? Is he a saint or a Devil ?' I began to debate within myself.

'A little while ago I was terror-stricken due to darkness; but the worse was to happen — now I am one foot in the grave despite the light !' Thus thinking I got determined to fight him out ! Soon I caught hold of and pulled his beard. This appeared to work and he screamed saying. 'Leave me, dear brother, leave me.' When I lifted the iron '*Chimta*' (forceps) to assault him, praying for relief, he said, 'Hold it on, I was only testing the tenacity of your mind and the determination of purpose. Our meeting is intended for your spiritual fulfilment.' This marked the anti-climax and before long he initiated an enlightening discourse on the supreme knowledge ! His exposition was lucid, clear and pithy and was in a language which was convincing to a formally uneducated person like me. His personality was so forceful that I was deeply influenced by him and was intensely drawn towards him. With an authoritative voice, he related to me the esoteric, the fundamental and the universal principles of *Dharm*, (righteous action) the supreme *Brahman*, the soul and the Godhead. That made me assimilate the concepts he was expounding to me almost spontaneously. This was like charging up a spent battery. The state of my

being was getting filled with divine bliss. My consciousness grew beyond bounds. All my questions appeared to have been answered. All my doubts were clarified. He then told me, "Now I have to leave the place, because the Zamindar has sent food for you. We discussed until 10 p.m. (During this period the Zamindar having remembered that I hadn't taken any food since the morning, had sent a glass of milk through his men).

I asked him *Sadhujee*, "Why should you go away now? How does it matter if people arrived here?" "You are yet to recognise me. My body is not gross, it is subtle. In the presence of others, how could we talk?" I was stupefied to hear this. I asked him, if I could know who he really was. He kindly divulged his identity; He was the great Saint 'Rushyasrunga'. That cave was the seat of his *Sadhana*. He was staying there and might come back again, With this he melted into thin air. Along with him the eight boys also vanished. Worst of all; the light disappeared, but this time it did not bother me at all. After sometime the Zamindar's men came to the cave. I admonished them not to come to the cave whenever they pleased and disturb my *Sadhana*. However, I assured them that I might go to their village for taking food whenever I required

At this time, I was floating in lofty heights of the divine planes. I had little appetite or thirst; no worry or want. I had a feeling that I was not confined to the physical body. I had a persistent feeling that I existed far beyond the reaches of my body. What an unusual, hitherto, unexperienced joy which defied all measures and was too much for words. For me peace prevailed everywhere in the entire cosmos, as if, and the atmosphere was surged with divine glory and tranquility. The night rolled on without any sleep. I got up at dawn, and took my bath in the Kansabati river flowing at the foot of the hill.

I spent the entire day in the cave with the hope of the arrival of the sage in the evening, as it happened the previous day.

After dusk it was getting dark faster inside the cave. As the time of arrival of the sage drew near, I experienced a throb of pleasure in anticipation. I tried to vegetate on our last meeting and remained in anxiety asking myself, "Where is he? Isn't he coming today?" By about 9 p.m., I sensed as if two snakes were approaching the cave. A mild snorting noise was heard. The snakes seemed to enter inside. 'Would they swallow me up?' I thought. 'Nay, my body would be too big for them. Even if they did devour, my body would remain in their belly; but because I stay outside the body, how does it matter whether my body stays inside the cave or in the belly of the snakes' – I continued to brood beyond the body consciousness. 'If, however, the body were to go into the stomach of the snake, it was likely to be deformed and mutilated. What should be done then to protect the body?' Soon I realised that although there were stones all round, the snakes do not feed upon those. If my body were to become stone, could it be saved? I auto-suggested to freeze and petrify my body and keep watch on the behaviour of the snakes. At once I assumed the *Padmasan* (lotus) posture and absolutely stilled myself just like a statue. The reptiles climbed up on my breathless body and a while later descended and disappeared inside the cave. I prayed Sri Sri Thakur to provide me with a ray of light like in the past night. But my prayer was in vain.

It was again day-break. There was freshness everywhere on the mountain top. I took my morning bath and returned to the cave. As usual, I spent the day without excitement. The sun set in the yellowing western horizon. Night approached again. I was reminded of the divine light in the dark cave and began praying again for the kindly light. It didn't come, but instead, two fearful tigers seemed to approach the

mouth of the cave. I thought that on the previous night I got somehow saved from the snakes. but tonight, could I save myself from the tigers?. However, I could maintain my nerve and remain fixed to my seat. A little later, one of the tigers, pushed itself into the cave. I roared as a thunder and tried to threaten it. The cave resounded like a gunshot. With this, the tiger receded a few steps but did not leave the place. A short while after the other tiger also took an attempt to enter the cave. Again I roared loudly enough. The animals were now halted. But I myself got mellowed and started musing about the futility of threatening the ferocious beasts. 'If they want to devour me,' I implored, "O, Lord, let them do so, otherwise, let them remain sitting as they are." The moment I had run through my prayers, the tigers, sat like statues without wagging their tails. I too was sitting inside. The three of us continued as such in a motionless state till day-break. Soon it struck me that if people saw the tigers, they might get beaten up or killed. Therefore, I prayed "O, Thakur, kindly release them" No sooner did I tell this than the tigers left the cave. Following them I came to the river at the foot of the hill to take my morning bath. I was spending the fourth day in the cave with my whole being full of spiritual delight.

The night drew in but the much desired ray of light did not flash. At about midnight I felt as if some women were approaching the cave. I could listen to their whispers and the jingling noise. I thought that they might have been misled trying to find the right foot-path up to the nearby village. But lo, they are coming straight into the cave !

I asked them 'why have you been here ?'

They said "We stay nearby and have come to visit the *Sadhu*jee !"

"It is not desirable that you prefer to come here in the night instead of day time," I complained.

"How can we find time during the day ? We remain so busy with domestic work." With these words they entered and came closer enough. Judging their intentions to be wanton, I shouted at them, "Just get out of here." However, they were not prepared to listen to me.

What was I to do then ? I dealt heavy slaps on them and forced them out of the cave ! Least disturbed, they told me that they were putting up nearby and would be at my service whenever required ! The next morning, I took my bath as usual and passed the fifth day in waiting and frantically praying for the advent of the night, the appearance of the ray of light with the *Sadhujee* in my stony abode like in the first night.

I was lucky. It was to be another auspicious and memorable evening for me because the Lord's blessings were going to be showered on me. The cave got illuminated fulfilling my prayer over the past four days. Again I perceived in that light the group of boys approaching the cave and chanting His name. They were followed by the same *Sadhu* as it was in the first night. The *Sadhujee* entered the cave and sat by my side.

I hastened to ask him, "Where were you all these days, Sir ? You just forgot me and did not visit these past three nights ? I have been waiting here all these days."

Without wasting time he began to instruct me on spiritual theory, experience and methods of *yoga* and religious practices. His discourses and expositions were unique, greatly convincing and impressive enough under the spell of his great personality. I became engrossed in introspection and could experience first-hand my own blissful self dwelling in identity with the overself. Time was fleeing and we were already

in the fourth quarter of the night. He advised me that I was destined to perform a lot in the future helping in the spiritual progress of many aspirants. It was therefore, necessary on my part to protect my body.

"It is impossible to work without the physical body. Therefore, it is necessary for you to retain and nourish your body. Unless gross food is taken, the body can't exist. Therefore, you have to take food regularly" he advised.

With humility, I expressed, "Sir, I am keeping fit even without any food. I have no appetite since the moment I met you. Where is the necessity of taking food" ?

He then explained to me, "Look, through your subtle body no work can be accomplished in this gross world. Therefore, you have to eat food by collecting alms, if required."

Because by nature, I was averse to begging for my own sake considering it as selfish and an idler's act, I just expressed my inability for begging alms. But the great sage assured he would arrange that alms would be provided to me. He then left the place and vanished. The boys chanting with cymbals also disappeared behind him.

It was again daybreak. The sun was yet to rise. After taking bath I returned to the cave. I noticed with surprise that nearly seven kilograms of rice, a kilo of pulse (*dal*) and some ghee have been brought by some one and kept inside the cave. I climbed up the hill and sat on the top of it. Noticing me, people from the village came in batches and offered their salutations. The Zamindar also came to meet me. He requested me to demand his services in any manner I desired. I asked him to collect alms from any one family of

his village and invite all the boys on my behalf for a luncheon and that I would eat only after they had been fed. Thus instructed they collected a kilo of rice from one of the house holds in the village. They also brought three earthen pots. I mixed up all the rice, the pulse and ghee and cooked food. Nearly one hundred boys and twenty adults assembled there. Three full pots of *Khichuri* (preparation of rice mixed with pulses) were prepared. There were no plates or leaves to serve the food. The boys volunteered to take food on the rock surface which they cleared for the purpose. It was community feeding.

I asked the elders, "Are not you all my children and am I not your Baba (Papa)"? "Yes" they said. "Then you will have the food first," so saying I served them with food. Some food was also offered to the she jackal (as a representative of the wild denizen) and thereafter I took my food, breaking my fast running over the past five days. Fortunately, the food cooked was sufficient for all of us. Everyone seemed to be pleased and fully satisfied.

Voluntarily offering their services, said the boys, "We will beg alms for you. You will have no difficulty." They then left for their village. I stayed at the cave without the least worry or anxiety.

The next day, the boys brought alms. I cooked the food and fed them. Whatever was collected daily as alms was spent the same day. It was surprising that food cooked out of nearly a kilo of rice collected as alms used to be just enough for all those present in the cave on any given day including myself. There was never any want. Three months were spent in this manner at the cave.

One day I thought, 'if the boys remained busy with alms collection, their studies or business may be hampered.'

Therefore, I asked them to request their parents and other householders to set apart some rice which I would collect myself once a day. At this time one Harijan boy of village Delang came to me and wished to stay at the cave. I engaged him for the collection of "*Musti* (handful) rice" from the villagers. This went on for nearly a month.

I noticed that my attachment towards the boy was getting stronger day by day. His absence from the cave made me feel lonely and I had to spend anxious hours waiting for his arrival. To cut off the very source of attachment one day I told him to quit. However, he was not prepared to leave me. Once I left him alone at the cave and went to Purulia. That night he had to stay alone at the cave. He got terribly afraid and was quite uncomfortable. He then wanted so motto to leave and did quit me after a couple of days.

Then on, I remained fully immersed within myself in deep introspection and a state of trance. I perceived the '*soul*' in its totality, magnanimity and in complete unison with the Universal self. I was indeed imbued with what is connected by '*Aham-Brahmasmi*' !



Other Episodes During my Stay in the Cave

During my stay in the cave, two young men from the village, H and J, one of them a potter and the other a Harijan visited me regularly. I was addressing J as 'Sakha' (chum) They used to visit me once a day. I was then smoking "Tamakhu" (a smoking tobacco preparation). They used to prepare Tamakhu casing out of 'sa/' leaves for me.

Occasionally J was getting possessed by a spirit, and during this condition he used to tell the number of seeds inside a whole cucumber. He never ate food cooked by any one other than his wife. He and his wife were living in a small hut at the outskirts of the village and were busy mostly doing *Bhajan* (Singing) and *Keertan* (Chanting). One night I experienced terrible bodyache. I remembered my Sakha and thought, how much of relief would it have been if Sakha were by my side to massage me a little. It was around midnight. Loudly did I exclaim finding J "God sent" in the cave at that odd hour to serve me. "How could you dare come at this hour of the night?" I queried in surprise I "You just called me-I heard you call and therefore I came here," he replied. He started massaging me and I felt greatly relieved. Thereafter he returned to his house. His visits to the cave were a mutual delight.

Sakha's wife used to serve me with unboiled milk whenever I visited their hamlet. She could anticipate my visits even remaining in her hut and save milk in a cleaned pot right in the cow shed. She would offer me the milk with utmost affection.

Instead of collecting alms daily from the village, I hatched a plan to collect alms from all the houses in one day, so that it pulled me on for a longer period with less of labour with this idea, I went to the village to beg. The ways of providence were indeed mysterious ! To my amazement, not even a single family offered me alms. I was utterly disappointed. Thereafter, I could realise that my covetousness debarred me from getting any alms at all, that day. I then decided to revert to my earlier practice of collecting alms from only one household per day and to remain contented with whatever was available. I, thus, detached myself from collecting and storing alms and since that time I didn't experience any difficulty.

There were many Neem trees on and around the hill. I used to take rice with mecerated and massed Neem leaves. Gradually I got accustomed and it was quite relishing. By and by I started to undertake fasting at regular intervals. To facilitate the practice of *yoga*, the procedure I adopted was to start with only one seer (nearly a kilo) of milk as my food on the first day, gradually reduce the quantity viz, three-fourth seer on the second, one-half a seer on the third, one-fourth on the fourth and so on until the sixth day and again increased the quantity in the reverse order until the twelveth day. I was also taking a little ghee with sugar each day in order to derive some concentrated form of energy so as to strengthen my system for the vigorous practice of "*Laya yoga*" (Yoga of concentration) and Samadhi (State of trance).

Once it so happened that the four of us, viz: H, Sakha, Jogendra Garai, and me together visited a local *Sadhu*. A *mataji* was also living with the *Sadhu*. They were having lunch. All the four of us shared a mat to sit on. The *Sadhujee* enquired of me as to where do I reside. "I stay at the cave". I said adding that "my *Gurudev* has been the founder of the *Saraswata*

Math (Monastery) in Assam. "Thereafter turning towards H he asked, "how do you dare sit with the *Sadhu* on the same mat ? "You are bound to suffer from leprosy". These words disturbed H very much, supplicating for mercy he said, "Sir, if that would have to be my lot, please suggest how do I get cured. Pointing to me, the *Sadhujee* said, "if you could render sincere services to him, you will be rid of the ailment !"

We returned with a heavy heart. We discussed among ourselves that, the pronouncements of the *Sadhu* couldn't be averted. It is bound to come true. Within the next fifteen days the disease appeared. H and others realised that it was the result of the *Sadhu's* curse ! H belonged to a rich family. He spent a lot for his treatment, but he could not get cured. On the other hand, the disease seemed to aggravate. By and by he discontinued and stopped coming to me. However, I tried to visit him and wanted to continue with our friendship.

One day, I told H, that I would undertake penance and observe a "*Brata*" (vow) and if he could render me some service "I can't", he bluntly refused. I insisted that he would have to prepare *Tamakhu* casing out of Sal leaf for my use. Luckily he agreed !

For the observance of the rites, I had to arrange for milk, ghee and sugar. From the next day onwards, I started dieting with milk and gradually reduced the quantity day by day as already described. Without informing me, H also started fasting ! On the sixth day I informed him that my "*Brata*" would be concluded and on the following day I would take rice. He asked me Maharaj, "Would it not be possible to postpone taking rice by one more day ?" I kept his request. The next day without taking rice I went into *Samadhi*. I had no knowledge of the external world. Towards the evening,

I slowly gained body consciousness and noticed. H sitting beside me completely unnerved having noticed me during the state of my trance. He told me, "*Baba*, it is absolutely necessary for some-one to stay with you at night." "Where is the need?" I asked. I have already concluded my *Samadhi*." I advised H to take a specific medicine and go back home.

That night remained a memorable one for me. I was fully immersed in joy. Words would be incapable for describing that supreme state of bliss. The following day H came and met me in the cave. For his personal well being, I again suggested that he should serve me with humility. Refusing me he said he would not be able to render any service and that he was soon leaving the place to go elsewhere. For his unseemly and rude behaviour I felt a bit upset for a few days, I sat for hours without taking food. After about three to four days H returned and told me, that he had been to Bhujadih near Dhanbad to surrender himself at the *Shiva* temple to get cured ! While he was asleep *Lord Shiva* appeared in a dream and admonished, "Why are you here giving up service for *Shiva*" himself in human form ! Go back home and serve the *Sadhujee* and you will get cured !" He then returned and offered to be at my feet. He said that all his pride and ego was gone and he was ready to devote and serve me. Since then he served me with his heart and soul and in course of time he got cured and regained his health.

It may be of interest to describe at some length the character of Nandakshepa who has already been introduced as my Guide at a time when I was running amock without peace of mind. He had been a *Sadhu* of a very high order, never disclosing to any-one about his attainments unlike many others. This wandering *sadhu* once had approached a Zamin-dar and obtained his permission to stay in his village temple

and also to take the *Prasad* offered daily to the deity. All the while he used to be engulfed in himself, carrying on with his *Sadhana* without claiming publicity. He would, however, wake up at midnight, collect straw from the farm-steads and feed the hungry cattle roaming around. The gradual depletion of the heaps of straw stored in the barns made the vigilant owners once catch Kshepa baba while he was stealing. Having discovered that the thief is none other than the *Sadhu*, they were amused and the next morning, reported the matter to the Zamindar with prayer to drive the *Sadhu* out of the village. Having listened to the complainants, the Zamindar said "Sometime ago I met Kshepa, the mendicant in the village and to me he appeared as a great soul and a kind and harmless creature. Your allegations against him, even if true, doesn't constitute such a big offence so as to get him out of the village. However, I assure you that if he did commit any other offence, he would be suitably punished.

The judgement could not satisfy everyone. The aggrieved ones, with a vindictive motive, launched a drive to ascertain if the mendicant indulged in any act unbecoming of a *Sadhu*. On one occasion they had indeed detected Kshepa sleeping with a young girl at night in a hut in the outskirts of the village. This news spread far and wide and those who were after reeking the vengeance were actively busy scattering the scandal. The elderly gentry, met the Zamindar with fresh complaints against the *sadhu* describing all about his foul activities and his involvement with a girl which is far from the ideal behaviour expected of *Sadhus*. They urged upon the Zamindar to visit the spot when Kshepa would be present. The Zamindar could not believe all this at first because he had great regards and faith in Nanda Kshepa, but by the force of the circumstances he agreed to investigate.

As the matter stood, the girl residing in the said hutment was a low-caste and was hardly out of her teens but quite charming. The fly in the ointment was that she suffered from a severe form of leprosy. As is customary, she was asked to keep away from her home and live in a palm leaf hut at the outskirts of the village. She obeyed her parents and lived in the hutment. As the days passed, she grew spiritless and timid looking like a pale ghost. She was denied the love of her parents and the association with her friends and other villagers. The girl was looking miserable even in the prime of her youth. She lived on alms by the road side from the passers-by and the nearby households.

The hut had an air of foul solitude, an atmosphere full of suffocating sorrow and a death like silence. Day after day she saw the sunrise and the sun-set which had little impact on her as she knew the pain and hardship that beset her path. She peered into the night, which was for her a dark inky sheet. In most nights she was moaning, swallowing a groan due to the pain of her stiffened soar muscles. The unwinking eyes were tired of shedding tears. Death was merciful for such a girl. Witnessing her plight Kshepa could not but had to take pity, went into the hut to nurse and feed her. As his presence gave her some consolation, he visited her every night. The object of his devotion was this leper girl.

By midnight, the Zamindar secretly arrived at the hut which had been already guarded by the villagers lest Kshepa might escape unnoticed. The old Zamindar peeped through the slit of the dried palm leaf wall, and found, the girl sleeping with her head rested on Kshepa's lap. In the next split second he had to shut his eyes because he witnessed a light of great effulgence entering through the thatched roof. He was stunned. He reprimanded the villagers for speaking ill of a godly saint who is a friend of the poor and sickly village folks.

Much before dawn, Kshepa left the hut. The girl woke up as usual, but she felt as if she had a new lease of life. The sores had healed up. She was no longer that murky girl. Her eyes expressed hope and happiness. She frantically searched for Nanda Kshepa but couldn't find the *Sadhu* anywhere near the hut. She moved amock without food or drink and at the dusk reached this cave (on the hill 'Badahutu') where Kshepa was in deep meditation. She was thrilled with joy and heaved a sigh of relief and fulfilment. She used to beg alms from the village and cook food for Kshepa so as to aid in his '*Sadhana*'. In fact she devoted herself wholeheartedly for serving Nanda Kshepa and moved with him from place to place for no less a period of eighty years till she breathed her last a few years after the death of Kshepa at an age of 96. The old lady whom I met at the residence of Kshepa in my first visit was this low-caste girl in her old age.

Days rolled on, months passed by and lo, the year was on the offing without notice while I stayed in the cave. One day I had been to the *Hat* (village market) in Pandui to purchase a piece of cloth. After the shopping was over, I felt an urge to visit Baba Nandkshepa. Soon I proceeded to his *Ashram*. On reaching there I learned that he was counting his days.

I went near him and looked at him with an earnest and steadfast gaze. He also reciprocated. His bright eyes were not upbraiding me but instead threw a bright ray of graceful recognition. The silence within continued and in that suspense the eyes exchanged their views. He injected all his potential gift into myself which I evidently realised in his presence. In those few moments I felt as if I was instantly moving up into higher levels of consciousness and bliss. His *Bhairabi* Mother (the low-caste girl) came near me and said, "If you look with

unwinking eyes to Mahatma's great souls you may turn blind!" Thereafter our visions were delinked. Kshepa baba then remarked "Kshepi, you are on the fag end of your life, with one foot on the grave. You may become blind, but why should the *Brahmachari* suffer from blindness?" With showers of his sincere blessings he announced that my internal (third or the spiritual) eye will remain open for ever". This was my last meeting with him in his physical form. I returned to the Cave. After a fortnight, news reached me that Baba Nanda Kshepa had left his mortal coils.

To my eyes Baba Nanda Kshepa, appeared to be nearly eighty years old but the elderly people of the village in the age group of eighty were telling that since their childhood they had been observing him appear as such. As it likely that he had been waiting all these years to lead me to the end of the road in my *Sadhana* right from the day in my early life when he met me in the "*Rasa Mela*" in Delang village? It remained as a mystery for me. I have, thus, continued to hold him in great esteem all my life!

Once some *Vaishnav* (The worshippers of Vishnu) *sadhus* came to me and requested that I may arrange one *Astaprahari* (Twenty-four hours non-stop function) and they would come to perform *Nama Sankeertan* (chanting God's name). I was asked only to publicise the event, extend invitations to all the local people and receive and treat them after they arrived. People, in general, gladly co-operated in such functions. Although I knew all these meant distraction for me, I didn't like to discourage the *Vaishnavas* in their venture. I sent invitations to the people in the nearby villages. Devotees from far and near came to the cave to participate. They brought with them, according to their mite, rice, dal, vegetables, and money. The following day I noticed huge stock of

eatables pouring from all over. Accordingly, the twenty-four hourly programme was extended to twenty-four *prahara* i.e., a three days' event. On the last day of the function, there occurred a heavy rain storm, and all the people couldn't stay on the hillock. They left and went back before evening leaving only a few who stayed with me at the cave despite the storm. Only one vaishnab *Sadhu* stayed outside chanting by himself. I was amazed to witness his sincerity, love and devotion for chanting ! Surprisingly, my finer ear was able to receive the soft melodious voice of the *Vaishnab*, vibrating the atmosphere around the hill until even a month after the conclusion of the function. The next day with the stock of provision at hand, a community feeding was arranged. The income and expenditure were found to be even.

During the later years of stay in the cave, people of different shades of life used to meet me seeking my advice and guidance on sundry matters. There were also the agnostics and atheists ! One such person was Sri Mukharjee who was then working as Post Master, Purulia. In due course of time, almost everybody in his family had taken *Deeksha* from Sri Sri Thakur, Nigamananda Swami, my revered *Gurujee*, but due to his scepticism he refrained himself from getting initiated. After moving aimlessly for long sixty years and getting wiser with age, he began to realise that it was yet not too late to do something about it.

Sri Mukharjee met me at the cave and took instructions from me on how to perform *Japa* (repetition of Mantra or incantation) and *Dhyana* (meditation) of his desired deity, Lord Krishna. By and by, he turned into a sincere devotee. After some time, at dead of the night dacoits raided his house, they broke open the main door way of his house. Sri Mukharjee obstructed them but was beaten heavily and fell down with

severe bleeding injuries. He made over the keys of the house. While he was assaulted, he was calling "Gopal" "Gopal". The dacoits asked him not to call any person for help, whereupon Sri Mukharjee told them that he was not calling any person for his aid, but was only summoning God himself-who is Krishna Gopal. The dacoits collected the booty and were on the point of leaving the house. At that moment they felt as if the *sudarsan chakra* (the wheel like weapon) of Lord Krishna encircled and fully overpowered them such that they could not escape. The dacoits couldn't fight out this miraculous power. They got terrified and were compelled to return the valuables to Sri Mukharjee before fleeing. Sri Mukharjee spent his last days worshipping and praying God of his choice, Sri Gopal Krishna with intense faith and devotion.

Another uncanny episode that took place in the cave is worth recording. I was once engaged in the observance of a *Brata* (vow) gradually reducing the quantity of my diet chiefly, milk. I was on the third day of dieting when my milkman told me that an uncommon woman had appeared from somewhere who is like the divine Mother in human form. She is so powerful and irresistible ! After divulging the information to me, he slipped out of the cave, and returned with the woman. I noticed that she was stark naked ! As if already familiar, she addressed me "Dada ! (Brother), why are you fasting and taking all this trouble for yourself. Break your vow and eat the normal food. I shall teach you the four *Vedas* !" The milkman in the meantime again slipped out of the cave and circulated the news in the village about this '*Bhairabi*' (literally fearful woman but one who practises *Tantrik* rites, with *male Bhairab* (aspirant) ! Out of curiosity, people from the village rushed to the cave. In the presence of these villagers she quickly changed manners and she behaved like a witch, crying and yelling in a very awkward manner. People took her to be a lunatic and disregarded her. No sooner did everyone leave than she resumed

talking nicely. However, on seeing another batch of visitors she again behaved incoherently. Finding no one around she repeated "Dada, why are you fasting? I have come to feed you rice!" At night, I cooked food and served her but she did not eat despite my insistent request. However, she succeeded in feeding me some rice with the affection of as though a demanding mother. At night, we had discussions regarding *yoga sadhana* and related spiritual practices. Next morning when people came to the cave she started to blather and behave like a madcap as usual. Her inconsistent unusual behaviour annoyed me. I asked her either to remain quiet and stay in or quit the place for good. Could she ever keep quiet? Then I picked up a *Lathi* (stick) and threatened her of un-to-ward consequences unless she left immediately. Only then she did quit the cave! But lo, after covering a very short distance, she vanished. I walked around the hill and searched all over but couldn't find her. Due to these disturbances, my "*Brata*" had to be abandoned halfway.

Once at midnight a *Sadhu*jee from the western part of India came and demanded to stay with me although the limited space in the cave was not convenient for two persons. "Is this cave your paternal property?" he charged me right away. After all he is my honoured guest, hence I gave him shelter inside the cave. I was then living on daily alms with no provision for the next day. As I had already had my dinner, I couldn't offer him any food. I asked him as to where he would like to sleep: in the inner or the outer half. In view of comfort and safety the *Sadhu*jee told me that he would prefer to sleep near the entrance; perhaps he thought it to be easier for him to get out in the case of any emergency I agreed and allowed him his choice. I slept in the interior.

While we were sleeping, a snake rushed in chasing a rat. For protection of its life, the rat entered inside the cave.

followed by the snake. At first the rat jumped over the chest of the *Sadhujee* and thereafter my chest and through a hole in the cave it disappeared. The rat knew the ins and outs of the cave as it frequented it. The snake was following the rat and hence it had taken the same route i.e. first on the chest of the *Sadhu* and later on my chest, and then into the same hole. The *Sadhu Baba* could not get a blink of sleep after the rat-snake race ! He drew in his breath, counted ten and tried to wake me up pushing on my sides, but I was comfortably sleeping. A snake chased a rat; what did it matter to me ?

However, the *Sadhujee* couldn't remain at ease. He tried to sleep, but failed to close his eye lids. His heart was beating faster. He couldn't even stretch himself; and was very much uncomfortable. I was observing his activities lying close by his side. As he couldn't get sleep he started doing *Pranayam*. He seemed to be a good *Hatha yogi* (A yogi who emphasizes on the meticulous performance of physical exercises). He was able to retain his breath for quite some time by performing *Kumbhak* (hold up). But he was stricken with fear the moment he exhaled. By performing *Kumbhak*, repeatedly he spent the remaining hours of the night.

The next morning he started to unload his wrath. He charged me saying "You are a thief, and have taken shelter in the cave to avoid detection. You do not seem to perform any *Yoga Sadhana* ! I am not going to leave you unexposed. With composure and without least annoyance by his reproaches, I just said, "Don't I know what all happened last night." Why should I get disturbed by snakes and rats. The cave is their natural abode !

The *Sadhujee* said, "Look, I can perform '*Kumbhak*' and stay for several minutes, in full concentration, but you simply eat and sleep; what have you achieved in life ?"

I then questioned, "Would you please let me know what you do for the rest of the day?" The *Sadhujee* asked me, "Could you demonstrate even this much?" Politely I replied, "Sadhu Baba, let me now lie flat on the bed and you may test whether I am breathing at all." Sadhu Baba got curious and attempted to feel the breath near my nostrils for a long time. He was amazed not to find any sign of breathing. I was almost breathless! He caught hold of my feet and implored, "Baba, I have misunderstood you. I spoke harsh and false to offend you, I now repent for my misdeed. I do beg excuse of you. Kindly teach me the *Yogic* method." He stayed with me for three more days to learn *Yoga*.

Life in the cave was of a special kind and quality, I was enjoying its marvels. With passage of time the peace within was taking deeper roots—that was the cause for eternal happiness. Unlike in the past, at my uncle's village, there was no occasion for any altercation with anybody or any room for ill will or misunderstanding. There was no time or leisure to think of material gains or losses; it was a period of complete detachment and an environment to remain fully immersed in, within the serene blissful self, of course, with constantly practising *yoga*.

On one occasion another *Sadhujee* had arrived at the cave. Rice was to be cooked for the night. The *Sadhujee* suggested, "It would be nice to have rice and fish for the night. Let both of us go to catch fish from the rice fields." It was the month of September, and the people had set bamboo nets to screen fish from water flowing out from field to field. The *Sadhu* proposed for collection of fish from the nets. I told him, "Let us go, but I am afraid, we may not be able to catch any." We searched different places, and moved from field to field, but couldn't get any fish. It was getting dark. I collected alms from the house of a "*Mahata*" (tribal) and food

was cooked for the two of us. After taking food we slept in the cave. The next morning at about ten 'O' clock the *Sadhujee* wanted to take leave of me, as he had to go to Purulia to give a discourse at Bar-bazar at 4 p.m. that very day. I had to yield to his request. Bar-bazar was about thirty miles from the cave, and walking was the only mode of travel. I followed him to a short distance and bade him good bye. The next moment when I looked back, the *Sadhu* was not to be seen anywhere nearby. My astonishment was at its height. Such strange incidents often used to take place. I was fortunate to have visitors of uncommon quality who were kind enough to sight me at the cave.

One afternoon, I had been to a nearby village. It was night by the time I returned to the cave. It was a moonlit night and I slept inside. I was still not deep asleep when I heard some people chatting and yelling. I got up, went outside and noticed a crowd. Since it was the month of April, I presumed that a marriage party, having missed the track was drifting towards the cave. I asked them, if they had missed their track, I could help. I called them aloud but it seemed to me that they had lined up and were marching forward. As far as I could see in the moonlit night, their line was visible. They started entering the cave walking by my side. I started shouting at them, "Where do you want to go? Are you fellows deaf?" I was surprised not to get any reply from them.

Suddenly, I recollected what my *Gurudev*, Sri Sri Nigamananda Thakur used to narrate with regard to the behaviour of spirits and ghosts. 'Are these creatures not human beings then? Definitely they must be formless ghosts,' I thought, and 'perhaps they were trying to, take possession of and haunt the cave.' After a moment's deliberation, I entered the cave alongwith them, and drove them out of the cave.

I got tired and was perspiring. I went to the river, took my bath and got refreshed. It was already midnight.

At one stage I was very much bothered by the thieves at the cave. One night, they stole my umbrella, my brass pot and some rice from the cave. I went to the Zamindar and told him about the theft and requested him to take preventive steps. He summoned a few villagers and threatened them, but that didn't work. Again my kitchen outside the cave was dug by some miscreants with the hope of finding hidden money. This time I couldn't resist my anger, and went to the village and asked the people to take remedial measures. I wanted to know if they could be able to restore the stolen articles, or I would try to catch the thief myself. The villagers requested me to catch the thief if I could.

I returned to the cave and kept fasting for the night. I resolved myself that I would not touch even a drop of water unless the thief was caught. While sleeping a woman (spirit) appeared before me and told "Baba, kindly get up and cook your food, I shall help you catch the thief I

I asked her, "Who are you and where are you from ? I have not seen you earlier."

She told me, "I belong to this village. My father-in-law had seven sons and seven daughters-in-law. All died of cholera. As I am attached to this place, I stick on and don't go elsewhere. If you desire, I can end the life of the thief."

I suggested, "If you wish to help, let the thief suffer from cholera. He may, however, get cured after I reached him." The woman (spirit) accepted my suggestion and said, "Kindly go to the village the next morning and watch the

development." With these words she disappeared. I went to the village as instructed and learned that one person had been suffering from cholera. A doctor had been sent for. I met the doctor on the way and learned from him that my information was true. I came back to the cave and cooked my food. I took rest after a late lunch.

The next morning I noticed that the doctor was returning after visiting the patient. When I enquired about the patient's condition, he told that the hope of his survival was remote. I then told the doctor, "Sir, I am now sure that this is the man who had stolen my belongings from the cave." The doctor was greatly surprised and rushed back to the patient's house and asked his mother about the truth of my statement. Since her son was on the death bed, she spoke the truth, "Yes Sir, he indeed had stolen the *Sadhujee's* belongings from the cave."

Thereafter his mother came to me, caught hold of my feet and cried. In the meantime people from the village had collected near the house. I went near the patient and stood near him meditating on the woman (spirit). I asked the doctor, "Please examine the patient now and determine his condition." After feeling the pulse etc, the doctor appeared to be quite hopeful and said, "Well, now the pulse feels better." Thereafter, the patient continued to recover fast and his condition improved remarkably. I brought my umbrella and the brass pot back to the cave.

Once I visited my familiar *Ashram* at Khadakusma during *Durga Puja*. I stayed there for a fortnight and during my stay there, I met Sri Krishna Gopal Mukharjee, the then Sub-Divisional Officer, Public Works Department, Orissa, an ardent disciple of Sri Sri Thakur. Both of us came to Purulia. We discussed

on matters concerning spiritual development, yogic practices etc. In order to test my patience, Sri Mukherjee discussed with me for days together.

However, I was least perturbed. He took pity on my abstemious ways and austerity, my simple and poor food habits. He suggested that I should take rich food, such as milk and fish unhesitatingly; because at the mature stage of *Sadhana*, diet restrictions are unnecessary. I told him, "I can take any food, but where do I get money from?" "I will send rupees five per month" he said. Apprehending that he could not continue to keep his promise for long I said, "Can you do it? Let us see!" I then took leave of him. True to his words he did send rupees five per month. In the first month, I spent the money for the purchase of some ghee. During the following four months, I saved the money. In fact he didn't send any money after the fifth month. With the savings, I got the cave renovated. The leaking corners on the roof of the cave were closed with cement. A door was fixed at the entrance

Once, I got an urge to go to Purulia. After covering a distance of 12 miles, by a short-cut route, I was to reach the village Lakhmanpur. On the outskirts of the village, I noticed a board which read "*Yogada Satsang Ashram*." I fancied to get inside the *Ashram*. There was a hostel for the students. It was around 4 p.m. The Head Master of the school met me and asked about my whereabouts. "What do you want?" I asked him. After a moment's pause, he wanted to know regarding my initiator. I told him that Swami Nigamananda Paramahansa Dev was my revered *Guru Dev*.

Thereafter he showed special interest for me. He brought out a copy of *Yogi-Guru*, the first among four authentic

volumes (the three others being *Jnani Guru*, *Tantric Guru* and *Premik Guru*) on various modes of Indian spiritual culture and practices written by Swami Nigamananda Paramahansa, and showed it to me. He then told me that the "*Mantra*" – prescribed in that book for arousing "*Hansa*" was different from the one he had received from his Master. Consequently, he was in real doubt as to why should there exist difference between two spiritual Masters ? He also said that he had been undertaking a fast for the last three days with the stipulation that he would not touch food unless he got a satisfactory answer and that God must have sent me over there in order to help clarify his doubts. I told him "Look, I am a dupe and you are a Pandit. Could I be able to answer your question ?" He replied, "I am a mere teacher of the boys, but you are an adept spiritual Master. Kindly dispell my doubt." I then started explaining to him the real essence of the scriptures. He started putting me a volley of questions; and I continued to answer them one by one. The discourse went on over a period of seven days. When all his doubts were cleared, I took leave of him and proceeded to "Ladhuduka," my native village.

After long years of absence, I was returning to my ancestral home at Ladhuduka. My memory of the past was fleeting. I had left home to learn about the ways of life of *Sadhus* and in course of time, I liked it and turned a *Sadhu* myself. I could feel the difference at this point of time in the present environment more vividly and I was moved emotionally to a greater extent than ever before.

I arrived at Ladhuduka and visited my elder brother Nagendra in the forenoon. No one appeared to be around and silence prevailed all over in the house. Entering right into the bed room; I soon noticed a doctor examining my brother lying flat on the bed surrounded by my sister-in-law and the children. The shock of the recent death of his son

had made him sick and sullen and he was having fits intermittently. Every one was pleased to see me. I sat by the bed side and began to narrate humourous stories. Around ten AM some neighbours who had called on my brother, left the house. My sister-in-law was the only person left in the bed room. At this moment my brother Nagendra, got fits. "Save him now !", loud cried my sister-in-law in serious alarm, and called out for the people to help. She was terribly frightened.*

"Why are you shouting at all ?" I asked.

She replied "You do not know Dada (your elder brother) will soon become unconscious."

"May I know, how are you feeling", I asked Dada.

With painful voice, he muttered, "I am going to lose consciousness".

Then I asked him, "Can you try to laugh heartily once for all ?"

"How can I laugh when I am going to lose my sense," he asked.

I then started recounting funny stories and laughed myself mimicking with strange voice and posture. With me he slowly started laughing and with intoxication the tempo increased and we both went boisterous till we were exhausted. After some time our laugh waned and then I told him, "Let us go and have morning bath. You will no longer have fits. From now on you are freed from the disease." He believed me, left his bed, and came out with me. We took our bath and food. Our talk continued on sundry topics for a pretty long time. I stayed with him for the night. The next day I came to Purulia, and stayed for sometime in the house of Sibapada Chakravarti.

On my way back to the cave my attention was drawn towards a garden and a flag flying on a post. I guessed it to be an *Ashram* and wished to spend some time there. I entered inside and noticed a person sitting in a room. Seeing me he said, "Baba the bucket is kept near the well. Kindly help yourself and wash your hand and feet."

On hearing this I just yelled "You fool; I will fetch water and wash up myself ; and you will be sitting and looking at me like an owl ?"

Apologetically he explained, ' Baba, I am a leper, how can I serve you ?'

"Why, you can fetch water from the well and can come and help," I suggested.

Accordingly he did and also made arrangements for cooking. I prepared *chapatis* and had my dinner. On his request I spent that night in his house. The next morning before I left for the cave, he caught hold of my feet and cried, "Baba, kindly cure me of this disease."

I told him, "If you could keep up implicit faith and devotion on me only for three days, then you will be cured; otherwise you will die." With these words I dealt him with a kick thereby collecting the germs of the disease on my person and left the house. My cave was about 8 km. from that place. After covering only 2 k.m., I could walk no more. With much difficulty, I reached the cave, and suffered severe pain for two days due to the disease. Soon, however, it occurred to me that the leprosy patient had lost faith. Sometime later I received the information that he had died.

It was the year 1941 (Bengali, 1348) One day my revered guide and well-wisher Swami Chidanandajee Maharaj, arrived at the cave. By then he had relinquished the charge of the *Mahant's* (Head's) office in the Headquarters of *Saraswat Math*, at Kokilamukha (Jorhat in Assam) and was staying independently at the *Manush Mundia Ashrama* (Bihar). I was delighted to greet him after so many years of separation. I took him to Maheshpur and acquainted him with my aunt.

Maharaj stayed with me in the cave for three days. He told me, "Bhola, how long would you continue to take this trouble. Better come with me and assist in the management of the *Ashram* at Manush Mundia. I readily consented and went with him. However, since the ownership of the *Ashram* was in the name of Sri Sri Thakur, it came under the direct control and management of *Saraswat Math*. As a consequence, Chid..nanda Maharaj could not acquire it despite all efforts.

Thereafter, Chidanandajee left for Maimansingh in East Bengal to visit his disciples. From there he had a desire to go to Tripura. With a view to establishing an *Ashram* there he sent me in advance to Tripura. Due to certain preoccupations, Maharaj couldn't reach there in time and this made me stay at Tripura for almost one month waiting for him. I had difficulty understanding the Silhatti dialect. That was my problem. Nearly fifty disciples of Maharaj were living there. They were very sincere devotees, but I could not help them much. At last Maharaj arrived there; but as the chances of building an *Ashram* appeared to be remote, we decided to quit.

The hour of parting approached. People in the village, in general, were not prepared to allow us leave. Every one had developed affection and an emotional attachment for us. There was a farewell gathering of faithful young men and women.

A tiny little girl had also joined them. The scene was marked by such sentimental outbursts of crying and hugging as no pen could depict. But, as the crowd started leaving us and turning back, the little girl came forward and stayed near me holding my finger, which I had pointed to her. She was not at all mindful of the entreaties of her parents to go back home, indeed she insisted on accompanying me and stayed close to me. In the process, unaware as I was, her toe was crushed under my wooden sandal and badly got injured. There was profuse bleeding from the wound but this majestic little girl didn't cry nor did she appear afflicted. I was visibly worried and gave her a dose of Ferrumphos, a biochemic medicine. Her sparkling eyes indeed were filled with tears when I had to exercise my liberty to depart. The pinch of that moment was considerable, even an ascetic like Chidanandajee was so much moved emotionally that he couldn't be able to conceal the tears.

Swami Chidananda Maharaj was born and brought up in Srihatta district of erstwhile East Bengal adjoining Tripura. The Zamindar of Atharbat having come to know that Chidananda Maharaj was touring in that area, had sent words to us expressing his desire to take "*Deeksha*" (Spiritual initiation). We were accorded warm reception when we arrived at the Atharbat Zamindar's palace. The Zamindar's family was very much pleased to meet us. All the members spontaneously engaged themselves to serve the *Sadhus*. I supervised the cooking in the kitchen. The ladies remained in charge of the supplies. Sumptuous food of numerous variety used to be cooked to feed the *Sadhus*. Within a couple of days, however, a member of the Zamindar's family who had been ailing for a long time, passed away. On this account the date of *Deeksha* had to be postponed. We waited for nearly 15 days but the local *Pandits* were not permitting the Zamindar

for taking *Deeksha* until about a month following the death event. Maharaj at the beginning was prepared to wait. However, I noticed that the members of the Zamindar's family in the meantime had become anxious to have '*Deeksha*'. To initiate some discussion in the matter I encouraged the *Pandits* to have a meeting with the Maharaj and to fix up the date for *Deeksha*.

The *Pandits* argued that during a month from the death of a member of the family, auspicious functions like *Deeksha* are not permitted in the scriptures. They quoted the relevant injunctions from the books. Having heard their arguments Maharaj replied in a resolute voice, "Well, those who are not yet born i.e (not initiated) how could they conceivably observe the rites pertaining to death? The Zamindar and his family members will be deemed to have been spiritually born only when they get initiated and then and only then they can observe the sundry rites such as the death of any one in the family! How could it be possible before they are born?"

Hearing this the *Pandits* looked at each other. Some of them murmured that the scriptures do not consider the problem in this perspective! Others admitted, '*Sadhus* can direct and guide the householders by passing special injunctions even though these may not always be in full confirmity with the scriptures. The householders ought to be guided by *Sadhus* because it was the *Sadhus* who by virtue of their *Sadhana* and sacrifice understood what constitutes the wellbeing of the society as a whole. When *Sadhus* are around, scriptures need not be binding. Their words have to be honoured'

Hearing such comments from the *Pandits* the Zamindar's family could realise the greatness of the *Sadhus*. Soon after, all the eligible members including the Zamindar received

Deeksha from Chidananda Maharaj and were greatly pleased. A young lady of the Zamindar's family was suffering from some unknown disease whereby she had been reduced almost to a skeleton. Given to know about her early life, I prepared a medicine worth only one rupee and fifty paise. After using this medicine she got rid of the ailment.

During my stay there, the watchmen of Zamindar's Garden complained to me that they suspected an evil spirit visiting the Garden in the form of a bull during night time. They told me that at night they frequently heard the sound as if it was rampaging upon the mango trees but in reality nothing happened. I spent a night or two enquiring into what the matter really was by concentration of mind, and could know that a dissatisfied Mohammedan soul was haunting that garden. I succeeded in capturing the soul, and driving it out. The trouble having ended the Zamindar's servants slept in peace.

From Atharvati we came to Barisal where a *Dharma Sabha* (religious meeting) was convened at the *Ashram* of Sri Sri Ram Thakur. At the meeting Chidananda Maharaj delivered a lecture. Thus, after visiting a number of places in East Bengal we returned to the *Ashram* at Manush Mundia.

During my stay at the *Ashram*, I again started dieting as in the past, and tried to attain "*Samadhi*". But I was not successful. From there I went to the village 'Sardiha' about thirty miles away and stayed in the house of Sri Satish Pal, a disciple of Sri Sri Thakur. I was allotted separate accommodation. When the members of Sri Pal's family assured me to render assistance, I started diet regulation and fasting. I had warned them that during my *Samadhi* state, when my body would appear to be dead, it should be preserved. On the fifth

night of fasting, my life breath rose up, but it could neither cross the "*Anja Chakra*" (the nerve plexus between the eyebrows—also the '^{Pineal} ~~penial~~') nor descend down. At the end, the merciful *Gurudev* came to my help and led the way through the impasse and I could, thus, attain fulfilment and peace.

A day or two after my *Samadhi* exercise, Satish Pal's daughter, while talking to me, lost her balance of mind apparently because she had somehow crossed the "*Granthi*" (the personality knot relative to inhibition). I tried my level best to bring her back to normalcy. But she just continued to laugh and laugh endlessly. When she returned to normalcy, she complained that I had not done a wise thing in bringing her down from the blissful state she was enjoying. During my stay at Pal's house, I used to dive into the tank in the backyard and for long time remain seated on *Padmasan* under water by holding the breath after exhalation. The rest of the time I was engaged in spiritual discussions with the inquisitive visitors. Finally Sri Pal donated a cow for our *Ashram* and with it I returned. Since the management of the *Ashram* was not going on satisfactorily, I quit it and again returned to my old favourite cave.

The year 1949, (Bengali, 1356) marked the approaching death of my maternal aunt. She was frequently suffering from fever and nearly forty-five years old. Out of three sons, two had already married and all her three daughters had died. I received information of her ill health and arranged for her treatment. After few days when I met her, she said, "I have been waiting these days to see you, Bhola. I have something special to tell you. Permit me to depart from this world, but unless you release me, I am unable to go."

I was taken aback by her request and was visibly moved. After consulting the boys, I could visualise that she has been already tortured a lot despite treatment and there was no sign of recovery. Her soul was about to conclude its role in the drama. She acted as my guide for a number of years when I was frantically running about for spiritual enlightenment. As her last days were fast approaching, she withdrew all her miraculous activities and remained calm and peaceful. Thereafter she suffered from dysentery.

It was the month of August. She said, "When I go away all of you will be in trouble. Our relatives are our enemies. From now itself, cut the big tamarind tree in the backyard and keep the wood ready." We acted accordingly. One day she told me, "I will expire today." In the afternoon I could notice the symptoms of death. I thought, it would be difficult to cremate at night. A bottle of kerosene was nowhere available at any price we wanted to pay. Under such circumstances I requested her not to insist on passing away during that night. She said, she would try. She gave us lots of good advice. She told, "Never deviate from the major aim of life, cultivate human values and build the character. As far as possible, stay close to truth."

By about midnight she stopped talking. I was holding her pulse tight. I could hear some talk outside the house. I sent the children to see if anybody was outside, but there were none. Half an hour after, she gained consciousness. In a low whisper she said, "Not today, tomorrow I shall depart. Cook food early in the morning and serve me." The next morning people came to purchase paddy from us. She asked "Sell the paddy, money will be necessary for the funeral rites and for immersing the bones in the Ganges. Save the sale proceeds." Paddy worth of rupees thirty was sold. By about ten or eleven in the morning we had an early lunch.

She then asked, "Call my daughter-in-law sake, housewife of the '*Tambuli*' (those who sell betel) family living in the next doors. When she did arrive and asked whether my aunt recognised her, aunt replied, "Not only you, but I see all your ancestors here and now." I was holding her pulse tight. Surprisingly, she began to sing with a melodious tone and in complete rythm and also at a high pitch. This was unusual of a person with one step in the grave. I had warned the children and others not to touch her, but the youngest son caught hold of her bosom and shouted "Mother," "O" "Mother!" Due to this interruption I could not keep contact with her soul and within the next ten minutes she left her mortal frame. A few days before her death she had told us, "Don't sell away land for performing my funeral rites. A friend of mine will come here and provide money."

We never knew how to arrange money for performing the obsequies. As was customary, relatives and brahmins had already been invited for the feast. We were waiting for the miracle to occur. Accidentally, I met the village woman who made and sold rice puffies (and who earlier had given me shelter when the villagers plotted against me) and consulted with her about our problem. She volunteered to lend rupees one thousand for the function. She refused to take our land on mortgage. With this money it was possible to feed the brahmins, the relatives and invitees sumptuously. It took us two years to liquidate the loan.

As I have already indicated, my aunt was an woman of high spiritual attainments. She was feeling and realising the Supreme in every object in every act and in every being. True, she had the bad reputation of being a quarrelsome woman but she was little understood by many. She was in tune with the

Supreme and having realised the nature of the ephemeral world where people perform usually selfish roles (having forgotten their true divine nature), she had turned disproportionately garrulous and people took her to be crazy. She was my guide, a true friend and the philosopher, a part seldom played by women of comparable social status. It was as if she had fulfilled the work left over by her husband, my uncle Gadadhar. She survived to see me a man among men which my uncle cherished till his last breath. She was always active and high spirited. She led a life of a detached householder of a level rarely come across among housewives. She was a lotus in the lake of humanity blooming in troubled water which this world verily is ! She had a soul which always looked forward to unite with the divine. She never wanted reward, recognition or return. She was an intelligent woman possessed of an extraordinary power of comprehension and of compassion.

The passage of time didn't distort the scene from my memory and it still enlivens me even at this point of time, when I think of her talks, discourses, her attitude to life and her resolute will power.



The Pilgrim's Progress

It was March-April, 1950 (Bengali, Chaitra, 1356). The famous Hindu festival *Kumbhamela* was going on at Hardwar. Sri Braja Gopal Mukharjee, my co-disciple brother of Purulia, provided me some passage money with which I set out for *Kumbhamela*. I took the Doon express up to Ayodhya and arrived there at eight in the morning. It was *Sriram Navami* day and there was great rush of pilgrims in the town. On the bed of river Sarayu, many co-pilgrim-sadhus and householders were taking shelter in temporary sheds raised specially for the *Rama Navami* festival. However, not a known face was to be seen.

On the afternoon I met a crazy *Sadhu*, indeed a replica of mine ! He belonged to the Kabir sect and was singing all the time. I asked him, "Sir, where did you get your food ?" He said, "I don't eat and hence I don't know."

"I have to eat something, though," I continued.

"Then come along with me," he asked.

I followed him without any further discussion. We reached near a temple. The priest supplied me with some *Gur* (jaggery) and water, which happened to be an invitation for taking lunch. My friend was singing joyously and loudly. I waited there till the food was cooked and sacrificed to the deity. By about 2 p.m , I was sent for and I had my food in the temple. Later in the afternoon my friend took me to the railway station and saw me off.

I boarded the next available train and reached Hardwar where the *Poorna Kumbha Mela* festival (the festival of the Holy Nectarine Pot described in the Hindu mythology) was being held. This festival generally continues for a period extending from three to six weeks. It is usually attended among others, by *Sadhus* of various orders as also the pilgrim devotees. This is indeed a meeting of the renunciates with the worldly. Ascetics and fully realised souls who normally like to avoid the din and bustle of the world appear in public on such occasions. As the festival was taking place after long interval of years as is the custom, I was really excited to attend it, not for fun as a casual visitor, but with sincerity to meet the God-realised *Sadhus* to spiritually elevate myself. It may be recalled that I attended one such *Mela* held at Allahabad during my early youth.

At Hardwar, I first visited the *Bholagiri Ashram* where I ascertained that on the other side of the Ganges, the Assam Bangeeya Saraswat Math (the one established by my revered *Gurudev* Srimat Swami Nigamananda Paramahansa Dev) had opened their camp. I went there and stayed at the camp. While moving in the *Kumbha Mela*, I was anxious to meet truly great souls dwelling around. However, to my mind none appeared to be of the stature of a "Paramahansa" (a fully realised and spiritually enlightened mature soul). I met a Nepali Naga *Sadhu* at the *Mela* and picked up friendship with him I moved with him for several days visiting various camps and shrines. Two miles south of Hardwar there was a place named Kanakhal renowned as the seat of *Dakshya Yajna* of the *Puranic* (mythological) fame. The sacrificial place, the temples of Sati and Dakshya Prajapati were located there. I visited these places with my Naga friend and met a number of *Sadhus* of whom I have kept no account. I met a *Sadhu* going on an elephant, I followed him, but

couldn't be able to meet him or get his whereabouts. At the end my Naga *Sadhu* friend took me to his *Gurudev*. I met him and greeted him saying, "*Om Namo Narayanaya*". He appeared to me as a highly enlightened *Sadhu*. He addressed me in Hindi saying, "It seems you are a disciple of Parmahamsa Nigamananda, eh !" When I consented, he again said, "A disciple of a Paramahamsa ought to become a Paramahamsa himself !"

I humbly submitted, "I am not a Paramahamsa, Maharaj !" "The offspring of a cobra is bound to be a cobra, and no other. Go ahead and try to witness a Paramahamsa in every one you meet and transform yourself as such," he blessed me with these words.

Thereafter, I was offered some *Sujee Halua* (Sweet meat) to eat. I took leave of him but, lo, wherever I started from that moment onwards every one appeared to be a Paramahamsa, a self realised soul entirely free from worldly attachment. Later when I happened to meet the Naga *Guru*, I narrated my experience. He was extremely pleased and said, "Tremendous, you can one day yourself become 'Paramahamsa' by visualising each and every one as a true Paramahamsa by nature !"

Thereafter myself and my *Sadhu* friend met the one hundred fifty years old Hansaraj Baba. We bowed before him. Permitting himself a smile he responded. The portion from his chest to the waist was looking very well built and quite impressive. Surprisingly, he also addressed me as the disciple of Swami Nigamananda, the moment he saw me. I asked some questions to him in regard to the characteristics of a 'Paramahamsa'. He appeared to lose his temper instead of trying to answer my questions. I keenly observed him and felt as if he wasn't perturbed or touched by incidents connected

with the baser levels of the material world. In fact he was dwelling in a much higher stratum of consciousness. As I could realise this, I started to laugh. Having understood me and my attitude he too laughed. I took leave of him after greeting him by saying "*Om Namo Narayanaya*".

In the environ of the *Kumbha Mela*, I was haunted by a desire to take *Sanyasa Deeksha*. In fact I had deposited money at the Bholagiri *Ashram* for this purpose. Coming to know about this, Chidananda Maharaj admonished me saying, "How come a *Brahmachari* of the "*Saraswata*" Sect take *Sanyasa Deeksha* from the "*Giri*" order this is not a welcome step." This refrained me from the proposed act. Finally on the auspicious moment appointed for the "*Kumbha*" bathing, I took the holy dip in the Ganges along with thousands of other *Sadhus*, which is the chief ritual prescribed by the scriptures.

After the conclusion of *Kumbha Mela*, I intended to visit Badri Narayan Dham (Shrine). I placed this proposal before my beloved co-disciple brothers. They donated me a sum of rupees two hundred fifty towards my passage expenses. I had to enquire about, the route, kind of food and clothing required for the journey and the related information from experienced pilgrims. I collected some dry fruits, blankets and some clothing. I gathered three co-pilgrims namely, one Bengali *Sadhu* and two of the Gorakhnath sect. "Not dry fruits but take some tamarind, that will be useful on the way," one experienced *Sadhu* advised me.

Rishikesh is nearly twenty kilometres from Hardwar and Dev Prayag is seventy-three kilometres from Rishikesh. We started our journey by bus. As it moved up on the ghat road my head began to reel, and I vomited. I got scared and told

my friends, "From Devprayag I am determined to give up the bus and walk upto Badrinath whether or not anyone accompanies me."

From Devprayag there are two routes : one leading to Gangotri and the other goes towards Kedarnath and Badrinath. The road was spotted by small rest houses spaced between two to ten kilometres. Near the rest houses there were small shops and in the choultries crockery and water pots were supplied to the pilgrims. For facilitating the journey of the devout pilgrims, especially the *Sadhus*, at many places en-route Badrinath, Kalikambali Baba's choultries are located so as to provide shelter and other amenities.

Devprayag is the confluence of Alakananda and Bhagirathi Ganga. The two rivers rush along from opposite directions before meeting at this place. I started my journey by foot from Devprayag. This was my first experience of going uphill with luggage on my back. I used to walk throughout the day and take rest at some rest house at dusk. Wherever township/village existed, we used to beg alms and cook our food. Having walked for a few days I got terribly exhausted and my confidence was sinking. My co-pilgrims, however, were exhorting and encouraging me to walk with them. They were even massaging my legs whenever I was getting tired. In order to reduce the load, I distributed my food stuff to others. Begging alms used to provide us with a variety of food stuff namely, fried peas, gur, wheat flour, parched rice powder, etc. When we were short of provision, my friends used to eat less and provide me more for my share. At times we used to purchase milk at the rest house and drink and at other times, we used to eat fried peas or gram, drink tea and push ahead.

About sixty-two kilometres from Devprayag we came over to Rudraprayag. It is the confluence of the sacred rivers

of Alakananda and Mandakini Ganga. The friction of the river currents on the rocky bed used to produce roaring sound and a chain of flushing waves. The natural beauty from Devprayag to Rudraprayag was enchanting. At the Rudraprayag rest house, I noticed one north Indian householder suffering from fever and a friend of his having feeble eye sight. Distressed and helpless, they told me that their friends had deserted them. I had Biochemic medicine with me. I gave a dose to the one with defective eye sight to apply with honey and also a dose to the other for fever.

Gupta Kasi is located at a distance of about thirty-nine kilometres from Rudraprayag. (There are four Kasis—the other three are Varanasi Kasi, Vyasa Kasi and Uttar Kasi). We started off and as we walked along, the humming sound of the wayside brook continued to entice us. Ahead of me I noticed an eighty year old woman walking with a stick in her hand. I also noticed a young lad climbing the rugged hill with gaiety. I then started to decry my pusillanimity and tried to gather strength and courage from within.

At Gupta Kasi I acquainted myself with a *Vaishnab* (devotee of Vishnu) *Sadhu* from Brindaban. A *matajee*, and a group of devoted householders, young and old, were in the company of the *Vaishnab*. They were staying in a rest house. I played a dog's trick with this group. I told my friends that in order to attract the *Vaishnab* and his group "You condemn Lord Krishna, and I shall defend him and uphold his glory". Hearing me praise Lord Krishna in the superlative, the *Vaishnab* and his folks came to us and developed friendship with us. They started praising me and acclaimed me as a great "*Vaishnab*". They begged to listen from me the deeper meaning of devotion (*Bhakti*) to God and looked after my well being with reverence. The next day, we reached Triyugi Narayan *Peeth* (shrine), a place about twenty-seven kilometres from Gupta Kasi. This place is the meeting

point of the road that runs from Gangotri to Badrinath. On that day we could get some flour of *kodon* (a kind of millet) and boiled it with water. It wasn't at all tasteful. At this point, I got separated from my earlier friends and had to walk all alone.

While walking alone on the road, I came across some Jawans (strong men) who had had the habit of wrestling and body-building. Soon a walking competition ensued among them, and I too joined them as one of the competitors. By the grace of my *Gurudev*, I knew how to maintain the body light and I did it in no time. With the aid of the lathi in hand, I leaped over at intervals and covered three kilometres in no time upto Soneprayag. This is the place of confluence of Basuki Ganga and Mandakini Ganga and hence its importance. From that place, there was a steep rise for two and half kilometres. On this road I walked and went ahead of the Jawans, and won the hiking contest. Before mid-day, I reached Gouri Kunda, and had sumptuous food — Chapatis smeared with ghee and Dal. Kedarnath was only twelve kilometres from that place. To the south of the road was the river Mandakini, the snow-decked mountains and gorgeous waterfalls. Although it was a walk in solitude, my eyes have been feasting on the unique beauty of the land-scape, the brook, the hills and the dales. In silence I could hear the vibrations of the divine spirit, which feeling was too deep to be expressed in words.

It was going to be dusk when I reached Kedarnath Dham. The shrine is at a height of eleven thousand seven hundred fifty feet above the sea level. The two rivers, Saraswati and Mandakini Ganga branch off this place, the grandeur of which is heightened by snow-decked mountains eternally guarding it from all sides. I went to the *Dharamasala* (choultry) and met some pilgrims who had come from Howrah. Unfortunately, they

declined to make some room for me. However, I met my *Vaishnab* friend from Vrindaban and his accompanists with whom I already had acquaintance. They were very much courteous to me and invited me to stay with them. It was biting cold and I was feeling awfully sick. I was comfortable when I sat around the fire heap for a long time. The next day there was heavy snow fall and I had to go to the privy with a blanket. At this time a cold gush of wind made me freeze to the core.

Nearby was a small tea shop. I went there and took a cup of tea by paying four annas (twenty-five paise). There was a burning oven close-by. I was forced to go near and sit down exposing myself to the fire. I was feeling quite comfortable, however, the shopkeeper didn't allow me to sit there for long. But I couldn't resist the temptation of the warmth on that severely chilly day especially for an unaccustomed nomad coming from the southern region. In order to have close company with the fire, I didn't like to disassociate myself so early and ordered more cups of tea by paying twenty-five paise each time and I had to sip as many as twenty-five cups so as only to pay rent to the shopkeeper for the seat on the fire side.

I visited Kedarnath Baba's shrine later that morning. The *Siva Linga* was presiding in a room having only one entrance and no windows. It was a huge *Linga* nearly six feet in diameter and two to three feet high. The devotees were offering flowers, fruits, peas and gram seeds etc. I saw the gram seedlings sprouted around the *Linga*. I was told river 'Ganga' was flowing underneath the *Linga*, and with the permission of the *Pandas*, I dipped my hand and had the good fortune of touching the river beneath the shrine. After the '*Darshan*' I returned to the *Dharmasala* where I was given some *Haluā* to eat. My *Vaishnab* friend, after having '*Darshan*' served me with some sweets as '*Prasad*' from the Lord. In the crowd I met two

Bengali widows in utter distress. They were sobbing with tears in their eyes. They have been robbed by some fake *Sadhu*. They said, "We have lost everything, there is nothing left for you or any other *Sadhu* to take." Consoling them, I offered money saying, "One *Sadhu* has taken from you and another *Sadhu* is giving you rupees twenty-five. Please accept it." They were not willing to take the money from me. However, when I persuaded asking them to return the amount after reaching home, they agreed and gladly took the amount alongwith my address. I visited the free kitchen at Kedarnath Dham and took a hearty meal. There I met two of my old friends, Sri Bimal Brahmachari (of the Saraswat Math) and Sri Gostha Bihari Chakravarty. I arranged food for them from the free kitchen. In the afternoon, walking back twelve kilometres down the slope I returned back to Gouri Kunda.

The cloud had slipped unnoticed. The sun hung big and red on the hills and water was glistening pink due to its reflection. While the dusk was approaching there was a drizzle. The *Dharmasala* was over-crowded and jam packed. I tried my best for a little space but couldn't find. However, my searching eyes could notice a little place between the beds spread by two north Indian women. I crept into that little space, kept my Kambal and sat over it. The women got furious and dealt on me with blows from either side. Raising my *lathi*, I feigned anger and said, "*Tomhara Jaan Lelenge.*" ("I will kill you"). Four of their partymen who were nearby cooking their food, rushed to attack me. Fortunately, two of my old patients, who in the meantime had somewhat recovered, were nearby. They recognised me, and addressing me as a *Mahatma*, took my side. The folks who had behaved roughly with me now apologized. I told them, "I can pardon the male members, but unless I get space to sleep, I can't pardon the mothers (the women)." Then on, they dealt with me very kindly and I was given sufficient place to spread my bed.

The next day I was ready for my journey. Those pilgrims from Howrah, who didn't entertain me at the *Dharmasala* at Kedarnath, joined me on the way to Badrinath. I was not even talking to them. However, one of the members of their group, who was walking behind, asked me "*Sadhujee*, what have you been observing? During the pilgrimage, have you already met God?" I answered him, "If the forest, the hills and dales, the clear sky, the beautiful brooks, the snow capped peaks of the mountains, the sturdy pine trees, the echo of the splashing sound from the waterfalls or the sweet songs of the birds could collectively constitute God, then, indeed I have been beholding God all along this journey!" My answer seemed to please my co-pilgrim.

After leaving Kedarnath, I covered about sixty-eight kilometres and came to Tunganath. It was even at a higher altitude than Kedarnath. The road leading to Tunganath was hazardous and climbing of the mountain was extremely arduous. At this place a tributary of Akash Ganga falls into a gorge known as *Amritkunda*. The pilgrims after taking bath in Akash Ganga offer oblations at the *Amritkunda*. In a nearby village named Beniachati, it was very difficult to get accommodation. The group from Howrah had obtained permission to stay in a room. But before they could occupy the room, another party wanted to take it forcibly. I intervened and supported this group because I too needed some room. As a result of this tussle, the Choukidar was sent for, and another room was released. Along with me others also stayed in that room. I became a favourite friend to all. After visiting Tunganath we proceeded ahead on our journey. In a way-side village, while I was collecting alms, I noticed that a local *Kaviraj* (Doctor) was treating a cholera patient. The condition of the patient called for serious attention. Praying my *Gurudev*, I gave a dose of Biochemic medicine to the patient. We were lucky, the patient felt much better after a short while.

The *Kaviraj* expressed his gratitude and the head of the family invited me to dine with them but I declined. However, I collected some parched rice powder and some *Gur* (jaggery) and took leave of them.

After walking a distance of thirty kilometres, I arrived at Chamoli. I fancied that somewhere in this part of the Himalayas, my *Gurudev* had the opportunity of meeting *Premasiddha* (an adept in spiritual love art) Gouri Maa's *Ashram*. As such, I had been wondering since some time if I could be fortunate enough to meet her. I had been searching at places and enquiring from people so as to be able to locate her *Ashram*. The next day while I was on my way chewing fried peas, I met a vivacious '*Sanyasini*' clad in ochre robe and emanating radiance of God realisation and divine love. It appeared as if each was longing to meet the other after an introductory dialogue. Like a mother and her son, we hugged each other. At that moment my mission of travelling in the Himalayas was fulfilled. I considered myself blessed and fulfilled absolutely. My *Gurudev* had received initiation from Gouri Maa even after having attained the *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* decades ago and only after realising first hand the 'Divine *Leela* (sport) assumed the role of a '*Sadguru*'. She told me that she was going to a distant place on the invitation of a devotee. She also expressed that they were two sisters. They had their *Ashram* at Pipalkoti, a place about fifteen kilometres from Chamoli. Asking me to visit their *Ashram* she left. At Pipalkoti, I enquired about her *Ashram*, but I couldn't be able to locate it. The memory of my meeting with the benign motherly figure of Gouri Maa lingered in me for a long time. I got some *Halua* and *Puri* to eat at Pipalkoti.

Jyoti (or Joshi) Math, is about thirty-two kilometres from Pipalkoti. This is one of the four principal *Maths* established

by Adi Shankaracharya. The other three *Maths* are Gobardhan Math at Puri in the East, Sringeri Math at Rameswar in the South, and Sarada Math at Dwaraka in the West. Jagadguru Shankaracharya established these *Maths* to perpetuate *Sanatan Dharma* in India and in the world at large.

From the month of *Kartik* i. e., October-November when there is heavy snow fall and when the road leading to Badrinath becomes impassable, the deity of Badrinath (Sri Badrinarayana) is taken over to Joshi Math and worshipped there for a period of six months. Again, on the onset of summer, when the road is free of snow, the deity is taken back to Badrinath. At Joshi Math when I took my seat near the *Gaddi* (chair) of Sri Shankaracharya I was deeply inspired by the Adwaita philosophy. At this time, the *Mahanta* (the Head) of the Joshi Math came in after taking his early morning bath, I prostrated at his feet. He lifted me up and embraced me. He gave me some rice, dal and other items for cooking my food.

From Joshi Math there is a road upto Kailash and Manas Sarovar. In this road, hazardous mountains had to be scaled over and possibilities of landslide and road blockade cannot be ruled out. I enquired from the Shankaracharya of Joshi Math with regard to the passage and other details about Kailash and Manas Sarovar. He asked me to wait for a month when other *Sadhus* would come and join, so that it would be better for me to go in a group; otherwise, it would be risky and one may get robbed by the dacoits on the way.

After crossing Lamabgada and Hanuman Chati, we arrived at Badarikadham, the place of confluence of the rivers Alakananda and Rishi Ganga. At this place, I had again to stay with the pilgrims from Howrah. I stayed at Badridham for two to three days in a two storeyed *Dharmasala*. From the Charity centre, I used to get my food.

It is said that the Tibetans were worshipping the deity of Lord Badrinarayan from time immemorial. Apprehending that, the great Adishankaracharya would capture it, the worshippers had hidden the deity by dropping it in the river Alakananda on the eve of Shankaracharya's pilgrimage to the Himalayas. Adishankaracharya had recovered the idol from the 'Narada Kunda' (in Alakananda river) and established it in the present shrine at Badridham.

The deity of Badrinarayan, built out of black granite stone, is about one cubit in height with four hands and seated in lotus posture seemingly in a meditative state. The deity is bedecked with golden and other valuable ornaments. A golden crown and a golden umbrella adorn His head. To His south are seated Kubera and Narada and to the north Nara and Narayan Rishis. In front, the two principal devotees Uddhaba and Garuda stand praying. The Badrinathdham is one of the most important pilgrimages of the Hindus. Near the Badrinath temple is the huge sacred stone Brahma Kapala Sila where Hindus perform the *Sraddha* and offer oblations and 'Pinda' to the manes made from the rice *Prasad* of Lord Badrinath.

About six kilometres from Badridham, the sacred 'Vasudhara' water-fall is situated. It is said, this water does not fall on the head of a sinner i.e, only the virtuous can visit it. I experienced an inner urge to see this water-fall. Although no one wanted to accompany me to the spot, I ventured to go all by myself. When I was about to start at 4 a.m. next morning, I noticed one of the pilgrims from the Howrah group was preparing to visit the water-fall. We collected some *Halua* for lunch, and started on our journey. Cold wind was blowing and we started shivering badly. I experienced stiffness and cramp of my muscles. We burned some wheat straw on the way-side and warmed up ourselves. After the sun rose

we resumed our walk – a scramble up and down along goat-paths and boulder-strewn gorges. After sometime, we came across the ‘Vyasa Guha’ or the Vyasashram. At that place there was a hanging bridge over the river Saraswati. This bridge consisted of a ten-inch-wooden plank hung by means of rope and another rope overhead to hold on while swinging across. A passerby – a local labourer – advised us to cross the river by securely holding the rope. In fact he went ahead of us fast enough swinging step by step. We followed him cautiously. It seemed as if he appeared from nowhere to help us in crossing the bridge and the next moment he was not to be seen. I helped my friend and also helped myself in this acrobatics that required courage and a spirit of adventure. While moving on the bridge the sight of the river bed two hundred fifty feet below in the mountainous gorge with water rushing down with terrific speed, was awe inspiring. It was almost a death trap. Three kilometres after Vyasa Guha we came upon the precincts of “Vasudhara”.

At this place my eyes met only lofty snow capped mountains abounding all around. The soft rays of the morning sun falling on their white surface reflected a spectrum of colours such as of gold, copper or silver and thereby presented the panorama of scenic beauty never to be forgotten by the beholder. The water falling from the Vasudhara Falls carried good amount of snow alongwith it and the mixture splashed down on the rocky bed roaring and reverberating in the wilderness. Added to the grandeur of the scenery was the dispersion of the sun's rays by the snowy water drops that created the rainbows. The splendid Vasudhara fall sight remained for me as a joy for ever. In the flight of my imagination I supposed that my revered *Gurudev* must have composed the lyric “*Ratan Asane*” (‘on the Bejewelled Throne’) ~~and~~ published it in his famous Bengali

book, 'Jnani Guru'.* The rise of the sun or moon at Vasudhara may prompt a devotee—sightseer to visualise the adjoining mountains as Lord *Shiva* and Mother *Durga*. As the sun grows in size, the mountain top on the eastern side would appear reddish gold and the adjoining one away from the eastern horizon would be still snowy white. Mother Gouri would be imagined as if dressed in a crimson saree bordered with copper-brown hue presiding on the eastern horizon whereas the adjoining less illuminated one would represent the seat of the snow (camphor) white *Mahadev*. Vasudhara is the birth place of Alakananda, where snow falls by solid drops as if Ganga Devi were reluctant to flow out of the hair locks of *Mahadev*. My *Gurudev's* compositions already referred to may be rendered in the following way :

On the Bejewelled Throne

("On the form and splendour of 'Gouri-Shankar' ")

At the Sahasrar (the thousand petalled lotus) behold
 Lord Shiva and his consort seated
 On the bejewelled throne of gold
 Methinks up on the silvery mountain
 Verily has the full-moon risen (1)

Down trickles the Ganga from Shiva's head
 The soft gliding sound breaks the silence dead
 Basanti, his spouse, to his left sits
 Her hair locks strawn over and befits (2)

* One of the six books written by Swami Nigamananda Paramahansa Dev—the five others are, Yogi Guru, Tantrik Guru, Premik Guru, Brahmacharya Sadhan and Vedanta Vivek,

On one's (Shivas) forehead flickers the fire
 (of the third-eye)
 The crescent moon shines upon the other's wellnigh
 On one's ears the black Datura flowers swing
 But those of the other wear the golden ring. (3)

The Lord Ishan's (icy) hands can effect the deluge in a twinkling
 But both hands of Abhaya (the dispeller of fear), his spouse serve food to the worldly-being. (4)

The supreme mother, Uma, sparkles in a gem-bedecked girdle (and blouse)
 Clad in a tiger skin what contrast is the waist of his spouse ! (5)

But pretty (and adorable) alike do their feet appear,
 humble 'Nalini' tells
 Those who meditate on them remain untouched by the messengers (of Yama) from the hells. (6)

The scenic beauty of the place made me wonder the glory of the creator with bewilderment. I lost myself in deep meditation for a while. Thereafter, I shared the *Halua* with my co-pilgrim sitting on a boulder beside the water fall, left the place in the afternoon and reached Badrinath by eight in the night. The visit to Vasudhara remained as an unforgettable experience in my life.

It was then the time for getting back. I came on foot upto Chamoli. From there I went to the nearest railway station and booked a ticket to Hardwar. While going, on our pilgrimage to Badrinath, most of the people take their route via Devprayag, Rudraprayag, because this route is full of natural beauty. Besides, there are sacred places too, on this route,

where people offer gifts, oblations and perform *Sraddha* (However, the return trip could be by a different route.) Three Naga *Sadhus* came with me in the train upto Hardwar. From there we decided to visit Mathura and Brindaban via Delhi.

The three of us, after arriving at Delhi, spread out our blankets in a garden near the railway station and relaxed. My friends were not inclined to go begging for food. Therefore, I had to start alone. I was carrying a *Lota* (jug) with me. Soon it got filled up with fruits like orange, apple, grapes, and banana. I received Chapatis and Dal as well. Finally a gentleman took me to a hotel and fed me sumptuously. Then I returned to the garden and offered my friends the fruits I had collected by begging. They were very much pleased and said, "Bhagawan aaj khaneko Diya Hai, Khushi se Khao." ("God has provided us with good food, Let us eat well").

We took the night train at Delhi and reached Brindaban the next morning. We got shelter in the *Sanyasi Ashram* near Kathia Baba's *Ashram*. Only one Naga *Sadhu* stayed with me, the other left our company. Over a fortnight, I visited different shrines at Brindaban and nearby places that had mythological and religious significance. I used to get my food from the different temples that entertained the mendicants.

At Brindaban the householders used to invite the *Sadhus* to their house and feed them to their heart's content. It is known as '*Madhukari*' (one mode of alms giving to *Sadhus*) and is considered as a unique privilege. Seeking the benedictions of Sri Sri Thakur (my *Gurudev*), I prayed, 'Thakur, won't I have the good fortune of having *Madhukari* at Brindaban?'

The next day, out I went to collect alms and was viewing the deity at Banke Behari's temple, where, appearing as if from nowhere, a boy caught hold of me and said "Come, you will be given good food to eat." I made over the chapatis, etc received as alms earlier that morning to my friend—the Naga *Sadhu*, and turned towards the boy. Lo ! He was running in front of me at full speed, and was getting in and out of the by-lanes like a shrew ! Following his foot steps I noticed from a distance that the boy just slipped between two young women who were waiting at the main entrance of the house. As I was attempting to creep inside the house following the boy they stopped me ; washed and wiped my feet, and bowed themselves down. They made me sit on an *Asan* (soft pad to squat on), served me with Chapatis, pickles, curries and sweet dishes. They fanned me with hand fans while I was taking food. They took delight in feeding me sumptuously. At the end they paid me Re.1 - as '*Dakshina*.' (A cash donation following a gift offered in kind).

One day in the evening, I went to see *Rasaleela*. (an opera about Krishna sporting with Radha and the Gopies of yore). At Brindaban, open air performance of *Rasaleela* is an every day affair. Young boys dressed up as Radha and Krishna used to take part in the show. The audience included Vaishnavite and other *Sadhus* as well as householders. They were offering prayers to the actors treating them as Radha and Krishna personified. They were feeding them with sweet meat, fanning with *Chamar* (a tuft of tail hair of an wild cow) and their feet were massaged as if God were before them in physical form. I was critical of the behaviour of the audience, to begin with. I thought that people were foolish enough to worship the actors. Can anyone experience divine bliss simply by considering the actors as God-forms ? My Naga friend took exception and objected to my mundane attitude. His view was that one should not criticize the mode of prayer and worship of others.

inasmuch as different pathways may lead to the same goal of God realisation and blissful existence. I deliberated upon the views expressed by my friend and after realising that the candid love and reverence of the audience for the actors was prompted by divine sentiments, I gradually discovered my own conceptual deficiency. Due to incessant contemplation and reflections on what the '*Rasaleela*' audience ought to be feeling once I myself was caught in a reverie imagining the same two boys dance in the mango grove on my way to taking bath at about 4 a.m. I asked my friend, the Naga *Sadhu*, to witness the dance I was able to behold but how could he see that ? Having been told about my vision he said, "Tumko Rang Lag Gaya Hei". (i. e. "you are indeed been engrossed by divine romance" !). In fact God is born when feelings deepen and get condensed. Divinity doesn't reside in the wood nor in stone used to make the idols, in conscious realisation verily does he reside. Thus, spiritual realisation alone is the very stuff constituting divinity.

From Brindaban I came to Palaschapudi Ashram near Chandrakana Road railway station. During our meeting in Kumbha Mela, respected Ganga Maa (wife of Sri Krishna Gopal Mukharjee) had requested me to visit them in their residence at Cuttack. In the month of September, 1950 (Bengali 1357), I came to Cuttack for the first time and stayed in the house of Sri Mukharjee. Krishna Gopal Babu was a staunch devotee of Sri Sri Thakur. His love for other devotees and co-disciples, whether they be householders or ascetics knew no bounds. His doors were open for anybody uttering "*Jayaguru*". The devotees used to enjoy the full attention and services of the Mukharjee couple and their children. I was given a warm welcome at their house. I stayed with them. At this stage I got an opportunity to learn the Oriya language. A study circle used to be held at the residence of a (Bengali) retired Government

servant (a disciple of Sri Sri Ram Thakur) who lived near Machhua Bazar. Interested people used to assemble there. Discussions on religious and philosophical topics and on the messages of the various scriptures were being held. I was usually asked to give my comments at the end.

Once a small religious meeting was to be held in this locality. Arrangements had also been made for having *Nama Keertan*, recitations of scriptures, etc. One reputed speaker from Puri had been invited. The organisers also invited me to speak on the occasion. As I had never been a platform speaker, I expressed my inability to attend the function and deliver any speech. But the organisers approached me and having been able to persuade me to visit the Chandi temple, half way they asked the rickshaw to ply towards the Machhua Bazar meeting site. Immediately after, my arrival was announced. Helplessly I had to take the chair intended for me at the dais. Because the speaker from Puri was a family-man and because I declined to be the chief speaker, they made me, a *Brahmachari*, the President of the meeting. As I was ill-habituated in the art of delivering speeches, I felt very much embarrassed and politely begged apology from the audience, telling that I would be a silent spectator only. The function started by reading a few *slokas* (stanzas) from the Bhagabat Geeta. The Chief Speaker, dealt at length on the cult of Lord Jagannath. He described Jaganath as *Param-Brahma* the embodiment of Vishnu, the Lord supreme in the *Kali Yuga* (कलियुग) and the only God to emancipate the devotees. He called upon the devotees to worship Lord Jagannath. His speech was crisp and brief. Apparently, it couldn't fully satisfy the audience. They wanted to hear something from the President. There was some hue and cry to press the demand.

I couldn't restrain myself any further. I wanted to speak, but before taking up the subject proper, I had to create a receptive atmosphere with introductory remarks. I first referred to the glory of the *Geeta* and spoke very high of the Chief Speaker. Continuing, I said, "But for the enlightened devotees it would have been difficult for the commoners to fully appreciate or accept what the chief speaker talked". Thereafter, setting aside the topic of ritualistic devotion, I started dwelling on *Yoga*, laying special emphasis on the control of senses and the mind by regulated breathing and other *yogic* exercises. Further, I asked that a few among the audience might be disciples of *Sadguru*, but how many were indeed aspirants or devotees in the true sense of the term? How many were true lovers and seekers of spirituality? In the midst of the din and bustle of the material world, hardly few aspirants could indeed control the mind, and tread the *Yogic* path? Unless one is a real *Yogi*, it is not possible for a mere ritualist to unfold the mystery about idol-worship and its relationship with God realisation. How many strive for such knowledge?" My speech although not intentional, continued for an hour. The audience was listening to it with utmost attention. In conclusion, I told that the real being who was delivering the speech so long had just left and that I would be unable to answer their questions, if any. During the entire period of the speech, my body worked as a medium for broadcasting. In my life I never addressed any meeting. I had neither capability nor any experience. Finally, in response to a question from the audience I announced the address of Sri K. G. Mukharjee with whom I was residing.

After the conclusion of the meeting, I returned to Sri Mukharjee's residence around 10 p. m. Ganga Maa (Mrs. Mukharjee) remonstrated for having gone out without prior notice and for returning late. The next morning some friends

of Krishna Gopaljee met me for spiritual discussions. Later some more devotees came and received instructions regarding *Yoga Sadhana* (Practice) and meditation. As a consequence, my fame spread in and around Cuttack. Attracted by my knowledge and experience in *Yoga*, a local *Pandit* (Sanskrit Scholar) arrived one day at the study circle meeting, and started reciting the fifteenth chapter of the Bhagabat-Geeta. The participants asked me, "Well, why don't you answer the *Pandit* ?" I said, "But the *Pandit* has not asked me any question ?" The haughty Pandit rejoined, "What I, when I chant the Geeta, won't you pay attention ?" I then admonished the respected Pandit saying, "Geeta isn't your own composition. What use of the couplets you may quote by way of support of a premise without having realised the supreme truth yourself ? You are still in the gross material body level, how can you perceive the real spiritual message contained in the Geeta !" My remarks set the Pandit bemuse on its purport !

A devotee and a lover of Sri Sri Thakur, Sri Uchhaba Sahu of Cuttack often used to visit Krishna Gopaljee. He picked up acquaintance with me and took me round on a pilgrimage to different religious shrines and temples in and around Cuttack. Once we visited a Mahadev Temple located near Gadagadia ghat on the river Mahanadi. There we met a *Sadhujee*. He was distributing herbal medicine free of cost. He offered me his respects and read out from the Mahabharat a story concerning the Pandavas. While talking to him, my insight was further deepened and a newer dimension of spirituality got unfolded. With great delight I embraced the *Sadhujee*.

On some other occasion, we had been to Puri to meet the famous Languli (Tota Puri) Baba, the naked saint who was staying at the Girinariwant *Ashram*. He was observing silence. After we reached he offered us seats and he himself sat in front

of us. For about half an hour, we both silently looked at each other. At the end, he said, "*Theek hei, yehi theek rasta hei*" (All right, this is indeed the right path.) and went back inside his *Ashram*.

Around September, 1950, all the rivers of Cuttack District were in spate and the coastal belt of Orissa was inundated. As I got eager to witness the flood, I accompanied Krishna Gopaljée to visit the flood hit areas. On our way to Patamundei, he took me to the house of Sri Khirod Nath Singh of Asureswar, an earnest disciple of Sri Sri Thakur. I was introduced to Sri Singh. Both Khirodnath and his wife^{were} delighted to see us and took immense care for our comforts. Incidentally due to some misunderstanding with Sri Singh, Srimati Singh had been very much upset since some time as it normally happened with the life partners. She was almost in tears when she told me about it. "Two days prior to my visit to their house", she said, a middle aged lady clad in West Indian dress came to my house around the mid-day and consoled me not to feel sorry for what had happened. She further told that a *Sadhu* would visit our house shortly afterwards and I should take it to be Sri Sri Thakur's visit itself". Because of that event, her joy knew no bounds to find me at their door steps. Krishna Gopaljée left me there and returned to Cuttack.

They requested me to stay with them for sometime. I told them "So long as you don't release me, I shall stay here." I spent a good number of days in their house. I noticed a tiger skin hanging on the wall. I was inclined to have it. Mr. Singh, thinking that its use may be harmful to me, was not willing to release it for my use. However, seeing my eagerness, he presented it to me. I used the skin very liberally and sat and slept on it. Later I had to take part in discussions on topics described

in “Premika Guru”, one of the six books written by Sri Sri Thakur. This one deals with God realisation through the practice of love.

After sometime, I noticed white stripes appear on my body. I comforted the couple and requested them not to worry about it. I deeply pondered over the cause for such symptom of allergy and suspected that the contact of the tiger skin with a body suffused with the thoughts of celestial love may have become incompatible. I then spread a rug over the tiger's skin and used it as such. In course of time, I was completely cured of the allergic symptoms.



The Succession Controversy

During my stay at Asureswar, I attended a session of the Neelachal Saraswat Sangha (the local forum where Sri Sri Thakur was being worshipped) at the invitation of a devotee. That devotee friend wanted to know whether there was any necessity for a person to take "*Deeksha*" from a *Guru* in the human form although appearing in a dream Sri Sri Thakur (Nigamananda Paramahansa) himself had already initiated him. Referring to what had been mentioned by Sri Sri Thakur in his book titled "Tantric Guru", I held the view that taking *Deeksha* (spiritual initiation) from a human being was imperative despite the dream event. The gentleman having read the relevant portions from "Tantric Guru" discussed about it with the Leader and the other members of the Sangha. Although after the publication of Sri Sri Thakur's life history "Sri Sri Thakur Nigamananda" in Oriya language, there had been a revival of interest in Orissa for spiritual initiation in human life, most of the members of the "Sangha" didn't feel the necessity of taking *Deeksha* from a *Guru* in human form following an oft-quoted statement (said to have been made by Sri Sri Thakur) "I haven't transmitted the powers and the authority to anyone to assume the role of *Guru* and impart *Deeksha* after my demise, I continue to remain the 'Guru' myself."

I argued on the necessity of getting formal initiation from a human being who has the attributes of a *Guru* on the ground that if that weren't to be so, Sri Sri Thakur would not have prescribed as such based on the authority of older scriptures and

traditions. 'How could such prescription given in his own book get invalidated after his demise ? When he had advocated the necessity for adopting a *Guru*, and guided by the desire of the *Jagadguru* (the Universal Guru or Param Brahman) when he himself had taken up that responsibility and discharged it while he was alive initiating thousands of spiritual aspirants, isn't it nonsense to preach that there was no necessity for taking *Deeksha* from a *Guru* in human form just after his demise ? Even if one has received *Deeksha* in a dream it is obligatory for him to again have it imparted by a living *Guru* and conduct *Purascharan* rites (Repetition of the sacred word received in a prescribed ritual), in his presence. It is through the guidance and blessings of, and allegiance to, a self-realised (*Siddha*) *Guru*, the initiated may achieve fulfilment—rarely otherwise. It was impossible to find an acceptable or competent *Guru* the "*Mantra*" so luckily heard during a dream initiation event may be scribed on a banyan leaf placed in specially consecrated pot full of water and after observing certain rites must be received back again. In "*Tantric Guru*" such procedure has been described '

As my views were not acceptable to many devotees of the Sangha, it became uncongenial for me to stay any further in Sri Singh's residence. Although they were offering me to stay, I declined. Coming to know of my intentions Krishna Gopaljee came over and took me back to Cuttack in the month of *Kartik* (October-November) that year.

One Rasananda Mohanty of Cuttack had picked up acquaintance with me during his visits to Krishna Gopal's residence. Sri Mohanty and his aunt once went to Puri to have the *Darshan* of Lord Jagannath. There Sri Mohanty had me appear in his dream together with Sri Sri Thakur and Lord Jagannath. Thereafter, he decided to take *Deeksha* from me. He came back to Cuttack and insisted on me to initiate him and the members of his family. All the same, I was reluctant.

Finally I relented at the request of Sri Uchhaba Sahu and other devotees, I initiated him, his family members, his aunt and some of the family members of Sri Uchhaba Sahu—about eleven in all for the first time. After attending the All Orissa Bhakta Samilani (conference of Devotees) held at Zobra, in Cuttack town in the month of February, I returned to the Khadakusma Ashram.

The Head of the Adra Ashram, Srimat Brahmananda Saraswati once came to Khadakusma and met me. He requested me to help him by supervising the construction work of the Adra Ashram building. He succeeded in persuading me. I went and stayed there for more than two years from January, 1951 upto 1953. During this period I remained in complete charge of the building construction right from laying the foundation of the *Mandir* and the *Bhakta Niwas* (lodging for devotees and visitors) till their completion. Adjoining the *Ashram* there was a dense forest, a hiding place for the bandits. Once the outlaws encircled me and raised objections for erecting the *Ashram* building within the ambit of their activity. I arranged contacts with their Sardar and explained to him that we were Sanyasins out to realise God and render service to the society whereas they were family folks busy with worldly work. It behoves of them to make room for the *Sadhus*. Fortunately, he seemed to be convinced and thus, following my appeal the dacoits receded one mile deeper into the forest.

During my stay at Adra I had indications of my approaching death. Pondering over the fact that death is an unavoidable end, my head drooped low, my mind became cloudy and I felt helpless. Once it was getting dusk. I finished my evening prayers and rushed inside my little room in the *Ashram*. I was feeling awfully sick as if seized by some unknown fear—the fear of death; the terrific word in the mundane scene.

The mortifying thoughts benumbed my mind. Death I fancied, separates the soul from the body. In life our greatest preoccupation is death. I mustered some courage and could succeed in brushing aside the wild thoughts. I realised that there is a continuous struggle in nature in favour and against the descent of the divine substance. The next day, as usual I engaged myself in supervising the building work with a spirit of determination. However, the death mania reappeared to my dismay again after a month. I had to spend days and nights in an awfully vacant mood. I was very much shaken up. I lost appetite and taste of food. At one stage, I had to throw away a cup of tea out of disgust. One day while talking to the mason I fell unconscious. Lots of people rushed to see and assuage me; but Swami Brahmanandajee (the Head) didn't come even for once, as I came to know later. People massaged some ghee on my body and bathed me. I remained in a subconscious state for a period of fifteen days. At the end, Brahmanandajee started quarrelling with me, and kept away forcibly all my belongings. I had perforce to quit the *Ashram*.

A few days after this unhappy incident, I met Sri Krishna Gopal Mukharjee. On his advice, I went back to Khadakusma Ashram and stayed there. Fatigue, indifference and inactivity were still lingering. As in the past, I was kept in charge of *Pooja*, preparation of '*Bhog*' etc. One of the young Ashramites named Sri Gurudas was working as my faithful assistant. I very much liked him inwardly, but was subjecting him to strict discipline. A short while after, the management didn't run smooth due to internal dissensions. I didn't feel happy to stay there any further. In the next meeting of the *Ashram* Committee, I placed the facts with justification with regard to the gross indiscipline in the *Ashram* and expressed my desire to quit. At this time, Srimat Thakur Chaitanya Brahmachari (presently Srimat Sebananda Saraswati) also left the Ashram. The then Head of the *Ashram*, Sri Chandi Chaitanya Brahmachari

however, persuaded me to stay along. His persistent request, made me withdraw my stand and work at the *Ashram* as an assistant Head. The financial condition of the *Ashram* was at its low ebb. I was allotted duties to look after the cows and supervise agricultural operations.

We were barely able to run the *Ashram* by getting paddy on loan from the local land-lords and rich farmers. On the death of Satish Pal, I attended his *Sraddha* ceremony despite being a Brahmachari and collected donation of Rs. 1000/- for the *Ashram*. Sri Braja Gopal Mukharjee made a donation of Rs. 1001/-. With these amounts cultivation of land was taken up in right earnest. Due to efficient management resulting from my past experience, sufficient yield of rice was secured from the fields that year. The devotees, and disciples within and outside the *Ashram* were impressed by the progress made. The number of visitors increased day by day. There was all-round development at the *Ashram*, That was the year 1954.

However, dark clouds appeared to cover up the skies. Perceptible internal tension, indiscipline, misunderstanding started to grow in almost all the *Ashrams* under the Assam Bangliya Saraswat Math founded by Sri Sri Thakur. To settle up matters, *Bhakta Samilani* (Annual Conference of the devotees) was convened at the Khadakusma *Ashram* on behalf of the West Bengal Unit. Thereafter seven successive annual conferences were held there till the year 1961. However, in the following year i. e. during 1962, the South and the West Units of the Saraswat Math in Bengal came closer and the *Bhakta Samilani* was held on a common platform. The reasons for misunderstanding related mostly to matters like location of *Samadhi* (tomb) of Sri Sri Thakur, selection criteria of the *Mahanta* (the Head) of the Saraswata Math, and eligibility to impart *Deeksha*, etc. In the *Bhakta Samilani* session held during 1963, a resolution was passed preventing anyone other

than the *Mahanta* (the Head) of Saraswat Math from imparting *Deeksha*. While serving as an assistant Head of the Khadakusma Ashram and even prior to it, in fact, as early as 1950 and 1951, I had already been initiating the aspiring devotees. In the year 1963, while I was at Cuttack, I gave *Deeksha* to one Sri Prasanna Badajena (then an M. A. student) of Banapur in the Puri District. But Srimat Chandi Chaitanya Brahmachari had his bagful of accusations against me declaring that I had no right to give *Deeksha* to anybody and what little I did was unconstitutional. I was, thus, seized of this problem and not preferring to remain amidst controversy and misunderstanding, I left the *Ashram* on my own accord.

Sri Chandra Sekhar Rana and his brother Nityananda Rana of village Raulia near Gadabeta railway station were very much known to me. They were fully aware of my contributions to Khadakusma Ashram by way of my role in efficient management over the years. At a time when that *Ashram* declared itself independent of the Saraswata Math, the fact that I had to impart *Deeksha* to whomsoever approached me was also well known to them. They were the devoted disciples of Sri Sri Thakur and were well placed in life. I politely explained to the Rana Brothers, "Once I have given *Deeksha* and have collected disciples, in all reality I am their *Guru*. To discard them at this stage by relinquishing my responsibility and surrendering them to the *Mahanta* of Saraswata Math would be a farce and against all canons of religious discipline. Those who preside over an initiation ceremony as a Priest, their case is different. I have not acted as a Priest. As I had accepted Sri Sri Thakur as my own *Guru* giving my consent and taken *Deeksha* from him, my disciples likewise had accepted me as their *Guru*. The Saraswat Math by no means can break this supreme bondage because such is the tradition coming down from ages from the *Guru* to the disciple-the present being a link

between the past and the future. I cannot disown my disciples just because the Saraswat Math does not presently approve of the act."

The Rana's family members having considered my stand, permitted me to stay at their residence; they even encouraged me to have an independent *Ashram* of my own at Amalasuli where I had acquired a piece of land from a devotee of mine. With great zeal and vigour I laid the foundation. In the meantime, the then *Mahanta* Sri Atmananda Saraswati came on a visit to Khadakusma. As I was very much associated with this *Ashram*, I always wished for its welfare and manifold development. Despite the disapproval of the Rana brothers, I came to Khadakusma, met the *Mahanta*, and offered him my suggestions, based on past experience as to how best the *Ashram* could be managed and developed.

He had hour-long discussions with me about the *Ashram* and other allied matters and expressed full satisfaction. He also expressed his regrets for the injustice done to me in the past. He further desired to expel Brahmachari Thakur Das from Khadakusma Ashram for mismanagement. I dissuaded him from taking such a drastic action in view of the commendable service rendered by Sri Thakur Das Brahmachari in the past. I advised him to take remedial measures instead. At one time when there was dissent between Saraswat Math and Khadakusma Ashram and I was working as the assistant Head, the rival group arranged Muslim Goondas (Musclemen) from Kharagpur to take over the *Ashram* by force. At that time Thakur Das had immensely helped me to disarm them with the assistance of the local people. Sri Chandi Chaitanya Brahmachari was not keeping good health and was incapable of taking any action. Accordingly the *Mahanta* suggested to appoint me as the Managing Head of the Khadakusma Ashram after initiating me into *Sanyasa*. He also agreed to permit me to give *Deeksha*

as I was doing in the past. However, he didn't give me a written consent despite my request. Somehow, I had a feeling that he would not delegate me such authority so long as he hadn't initiated me into *Sanyasa*.

I didn't accept the offer even temporarily in view of the uncertainty and flexibility on which it was based. However, due to my inherent weakness for the Ashramites, I couldn't set aside their request. On their persuasion, and due to my long years of association and intimate attachment to the Khadakusma Ashram where I had given my sweat and blood to raise its status, I agreed to become its Head and also to impart *Deeksha*. The members of Rana's family were surprised at my decision. However, soon I was haunted by a foreboding that my days at the *Ashram* were getting numbered. Although the *Mahanta Maharaj* had made me the Managing Head of the *Ashram*, in reality it remained ineffective. Whatever alms, money and other articles were sent by the devotees, all that were collected by Srimat Chandi Chaitanya Brahmachari, as he had the letter of authority from the *Mahanta* to receive them on his behalf. In fact Brahmacharijee held the purse and I was only a shadow. I was terribly annoyed at the state of affairs, and out of disgust, left Khadakusma Ashram for good.

I had, thus, to leave a place from where I had received nothing but kindness and inspiration all my life. I walked on, down the steps, onto the road and down through the village. My eyes skimmed along the road but did not find anyone approaching me with a word of sympathy. In the days that followed, my thoughts were fraught by a passion to survive and to mingle with the outside world. I had yet no knowledge of a basement to give me a feeling of security.



My Initiation into Sanyasa

After deserting the Khadakusma Ashram, I was in such a miserable state that my enthusiasm dampened even for completing the halfdone hutment at Amalasuli as planned earlier. I took some financial assistance from one of the Rana brothers and proceeded to Cuttack. At that time, Sri Prajnanda Saraswati, the erstwhile *Mahanta* of the Assam Bangiya Saraswat Math, was staying at Bhubaneswar. My co-disciple brother Sri Krishna Gopal Mukharjee suggested me to take *Sanyasa Deeksha* from Prajnanandajee. He told me that Prajnanda was a self realised soul and a saint of very high order. He had been initiated by Swami Nigamananda Saraswati into the Sanyasa Ashram according to the Vedic rites and had been kept in charge of the Assam Bangiya Saraswat Math. Cautioning Sri Mukharjee said, "You have the necessary mental and physical stamina as a Brahmachari, and the virtues you have acquired by *Tapas* (meditation) qualify you for *Sanyasa Deeksha*. In order to help maintain the legacy of the *Gurus* and to uphold and propagate the ideals and objects of the Saraswat Math as well as of the many Ashrams and Sanghas established by Sri Sri Thakur, you seem to be quite competent and hence try to get *Sanyasa Deeksha* from Swami Prajnanandajee as early as you can. Go and surrender before him soon. He is already old and presently indisposed but he is the rightful successor of Sri Sri Thakur."

Although by undertaking austere *Yoga Sadhana*, I had attained the knowledge of the self, at times I was feeling deficient for not having been formally initiated into the Sanyasa Ashram by a superior *Sanyasin* of my own Saraswat Order or any

other "*Dasanama*"* Order created by Adishankarachary. There are the four "*Maha Vakyas*" the supreme mottoes of the four Vedas viz, '*Aham Brahmarshmi*', '*Tattwamasi*', '*Ayamatma Brahma*' and '*Prajnanam Brahma*'. Since the day I was discouraged by Chidanandajee at Kumbha Mela from taking *Sanyasa Deeksha* from the *Giri* Order, I wasn't very much intent about it. However, after Sri Mukharjee's advice, although I didn't really mean it, I had told him in a carefree tone, "I don't like to become a *Sanyasi* and there is no need for it for a person like me." The fact really was that I had not been able to admire or respect Srimat Prajnananda Saraswati. Moreover, the demise of Sri Sri Thakur had its impact on me. Among all the senior disciples, I was really drawn towards Chidanandajee because he was my guide in the early stages of my *Sadhana* following my initiation into the Brahmacharya Ashram. His devotedness, simple living, generosity, and high ideals had a tremendous influence on me.

Once I dreamed that arrangements for my taking *Sanyasa Deeksha* were briskly going on, but the venue and the *Gurujee* who was to initiate me remained obscure. For the second and the third time also I dreamed alike but the identity of the *Guru* could not be ascertained. On a fourth occasion, I believe, I questioned myself, "Who indeed was to be my *Guru*?" I saw Swami Prajnananda throwing away all the images one by one: Swami Atmananda's was thrown away like others, but when Srimat Chidanandajee's image was removed, I was deeply hurt. While I had been making an attempt to lift and restore it, I was wide awake.

Having repeatedly dreamt in the manner just described, I developed some anxiety to take *Sanyasa*. I approached Prajnananda Maharaj at Bhubaneswar and offering my candidature to

* The nine other orders being *Giri*, *Puree*, *Bharati*, *Teertha*, *Ashram*, *Aranya*, *Sagar*, *Bana* and *Parvat*.

him. I prayed, "Kindly give me *Sanyasa Deeksha*, otherwise, I may be forced to take refuge outside the Saraswat Order. However, I don't like to take *Deeksha* from a novice. If you don't agree, I shall desperately try first at the Sringeri Math," one of the four Maths established by Sri Shankaracharya, which is located in Karnataka. Prajnanandajee wasn't then keeping good health. He said, "How can I give you *Sanyasa* now when I am sick?" I said, "Kindly give me word that you will initiate me after you get cured and I shall wait." He said, "Well, let me see". Thereafter, I came back to Gadabeta.

Accidentally, before long, I met Chidananda Maharaj. I narrated him my dream episode and my brief discussion with Swami Prajnanandajee. I also requested him to give me *Sanyas Deeksha*. But he declined. At that time, Chidanandajee was staying at a place named Chhotbadua near Midnapore in a small *Ashram* built by him. He was free from all anxieties and had no attachment of any kind. I went to his *Ashram* and exercised terrific pressure on him to impart me *Sanyas Deeksha*. In a defiant mood I even went to the extent of threatening him. He remained as strong as a rock, unmoved. My close intimacy with him for long years, had made me behave with him like a friend. He politely told me that due to his poor health, he could not impart *Deeksha*. He advised me, however, that it was desirable on my part to approach either Prajnananda Maharaj or Swami Nirvananandajee for this purpose. Following his advice, the next year I came to Cuttack. There I came to know that Prajnananda Maharaj was residing at Bhubaneswar near 'Mausima' temple in his newly established Nigamananda Math. He had then desired to give *Sanyasa Deeksha* to a disciple of Sri Sri Thakur named Manik Brahmachari. However, Manik Brahmachari was reported to have pleaded my case saying, "Maharaj, in my view, between the two of us praying for *Sanyasa Deeksha*, Srimat Bhola Chaitanya Brahmachari is more

deserving because he has longstanding experience of *Yoga Sadhana* to his credit. He spent several years in the cave and has even attained *Samadhi*. When he met you last time, you promised him to grant his prayer when you recovered from ill-health."

At this time I was staying at Cuttack. Manik Brahmachari met me and narrated to me the details of his discussions with Prajnananda Maharaj. With an assurance to secure an interview with the Maharaj he took me to Bhubaneswar. After discussing matters concerning both of us, Maharaj agreed to give me *Sanyas Deeksha*. Following his consent I went over to my disciple Sri Prasanna Badajena's village 'Baledih' near Banpur and collected some pure ghee and a 'Danda' (bamboo staff) required for the initiation rites. I deposited those with Swamijee Maharaj and offered my *Pranam* regarding him merely as my senior co-disciple. He could immediately sense from my behaviour the lack of reverence and obedience expected of an intending disciple and was painfully agitated. He became angry and shouted that he wouldn't initiate me at all ! Evidently, the manifested view of the Swamijee was, 'He who doesn't know how to offer *Pranam* in an humble and respectful manner to his would-be *Guru*, how could he deserve *Sanyasa Deeksha*?' This incident once again disheartened me. I lost all hopes, however, I did know my error, and indeed became deeply penitent.

On my behalf, Sri Uchhaba Sahu, one of the sincere devotees, approached Maharaj and pleaded in my favour. I then went and again prostrated before him with all the humility and respect of a disciple. This apparently pleased him and he

asked me, "Would you stay in my *Ashram* after getting initiated into *Sanyasa* ?" Yet another dangerous test confronted me. I told him in clear words, "No, Sir, I can't stay here." This irritated him, and he turned back and once again refused to initiate me. Sri Uchhaba Sahu once more sought his grace and pleading on my behalf implored him to relent without any stipulation or conditions. At last as good luck ^{might} ~~may~~ have it, Swamijee consented but soon asked me "You have come from Khadakusma ! Would you not start quarrelling here ? With humility, I vowed and submitted, "Maharaj, I promise, I shall never pick up quarrel with anyone of your Ashramites and shall never interfere in the management of your *Ashram*.

The eighth day of the bright fortnight of *Aswin* (September October), 1964 was fixed for my *Sanyasa Deeksha*. The required materials for the *Deeksha* were listed out. I was asked to procure a pair of Vidyasagar style foot-wear for my *Guru* (Initiator), but as they were not available either at Bhubaneswar or Cuttack, money, in lieu thereof, was deposited. With the kind help of Sri Gopal Chandra Dash, I. A. S., a great scholar and forthright devotee of Sri Sri Thakur, (then working as the Director of Agriculture) a *Kamandalu* (water pot) and other necessary and rare items were procured on the eve of the appointed day. I had a complete head shave and bath. The priest helped me perform the *Sraddha* rites. The *Biraja Havan* was then performed. I was given the *Danda* and the *Kamandalu* as required. Then the Maharaj whispered into my ears vedic '*Mahavakya*' appropriate of the "Saraswat" order and having been overwhelmed by emotions became un-conscious.

Regaining his senses he told me, "I confer on you the title of 'Bisuddhananda'. Henceforth you acquire the full right to initiate other men and women into the fourfold Ashram, viz, *Brahmacharya*, *Garhyastha*, *Vanaprastha* and *Sanyasa*. I do hereby bequeath the *Guru's* authority received from Swami Nigamananda Paramahansa Dev, my revered Gurujee, to you and thus get myself freed—I can now breath my last in peace. Besides, you are no more required to carry the *Danda* and *Kamandalu* like a novice. Give them back", so saying he took those back from me. He instructed me to recite *Kaupin Panchaka*¹, *Nirvan Sataka*² and *Sadyojata Sukta*³ every morning and evening.

After taking *Sanyasa*, I experienced remarkable mental changes in me. I felt as if I had been completely reformed. Although I was known in the public as a Brahmachari, inadvertently this designation had slipped off of my concept long ago. However, I was waiting for the next step for a resurrection. Immediately after taking *Sanyasa* I felt as if the yet imprisoned soul had come out of my body like a lion from the cage. With the tranquil mind having submerged in the free and blissful overself, all inhibitions and imperfections vanished.

1, 2. Sanskrit poetry having five and six stanzas, respectively, composed by Adishankaracharya in order to extol asceticism, and the role of nondualistic knowledge in attaining *Nirvana* or merger of the individual self with the Param Brahma or the Absolute.

3. Vedic composition.



Swami Prajnananda Saraswati

When I was taking permission of my *Gurujee* (who had just initiated me into *Sanyasa*) to leave for Midnapore alongwith Sri Manik Brahmachari, the Maharaj administered such a word of caution with command that two drops of tears rolled down my cheeks, With the roar of the thunder he declared, "Look, you need not have to beg alms for living I Live like a Maharaj; the potential kindness of the spirit of the eternal *Guru* will sustain you for ever."



A new Ashram is founded

In the month of December, 1964, the 50th (i.e. the Diamond Jubilee) annual session of the Sarvabhauma Bhaktasammilani was being held at Kokilamukha (Assam Bangiya Saraswat) *Math* located near Jorhat. The Mukharjee brothers— Sri Braja Gopal and Sri Krishna Gopal and the Ranas of Godabeta, provided me the necessary travel expenses for attending the Sammilani. I took the train upto Howrah and from there flew to Gauhati. Continuing my journey by train I reached Jorhat. The news about my presence at the conference soon gained wide circulation, more so, for the fact of my having been initiated into *Sanyasa* by Prajnananda Saraswati. The presiding Mahant Maharaj having come to know of this, soon announced at the conference that I have been ousted from the *Math* and all the *Ashrams* founded by Swami Nigamananda Paramahansa. I remained most indifferent to this proclamation. After the conference I returned to Rana's residence at Gadabeta.

Just after a year, on the fifth of January, 1965, my *Sanyasa Guru* Swami Prajnananda Saraswati Maharaj attained *Mahanirvana* (i.e. he passed away). As soon as I got the sad news, I rushed to Bhubaneswar and attended the *Mahasamadhi* (death) rites. On the twelfth day, under the directions of Srimat Swami Sachidananda Saraswati of Shankarananda *Math* in Bhubaneswar, worship of Sri Sri Guru Brahman, Narayan Bali, and Havan were performed according to the traditional methods. During those few days, I remained fully engaged in receiving and treating invitees,

the Brahmacharis, Sanyasins and householder devotees. I also offered worship at the feet of the invited Sanyasins, as is customary on such occasions.

A devout *Sadhaka* takes to *sanyasa* in order to free himself from the material bondage, the ties of worldly attachment, and to pursue the ideals of an ascetic as prescribed in the sacred scriptures. But if such opportunities are denied by the almighty mother *Yogmaya*, it becomes impossible for a *Sadhaka* to make any progress at all. Having taken shelter under a branch of my revered Primary *Guru* who verily served as the mighty (Nigam) tree, I discovered that in the demise (only after a year of my initiation) of Prajnananda Maharaj, that branch got severed thus, setting me free from the ties and attachments (positive and negative) whatever were still left.

I was staying at Gadabeta on my return from Bhubaneswar. I was constantly being bothered by self enquiries like, "How can I spend the rest of my life, and what will be my field of action ?" I wanted to build a cottage inside the *Ashram* premises of Chidananda Maharaj at Chhotbadua near Midnapore and stay there for the rest of my life. But my attempts proved fruitless. At the end, I came again back at Gadabeta to the residence of the Ranas.

Although I had earlier decided to have an *Ashram* at Amalasuli, and in fact laid its foundation I had to abandon it. During my stay at the Rana's house, the Divine Mother *Sarba Mangala*, the presiding deity of Gadabeta appeared in a dream and desired me to have my *Ashram* located near Gadabeta itself. I immediately became conscious of the presence of the Mother, as if, she were present near me wherever I went. She is the power behind all manifestations, the Prime Mover of the world and of the Gods. In her two arms, on the left she held a sword and a severed head, on the right she offered

gifts and beckoned "Come, fear not !" Mother Mangala is the angel guardian of Gadabeta. Her temple was facing South, but during the Marahatta (Burgis) raids, in order to evade the aggressors, as the legend has it, the South facing frontage of the temple turned North.

After I narrated the dream event to the Rana brothers, they took me round several places for the selection of an *Ashram* site. But realising my anxiety to have an *Ashram* near the station, Sri Chandra Sekhar Rana, the elder of the two brothers, made a magnanimous gesture (as if guided by the wishes of Mother Mangala) and donated a plot of land measuring 120 × 90 cubits in my name in the Jharboni Mauza of Gadabeta.

It was *Akshya Tritiya* day in the month of *Baishakh* (April-May), 1966. I invoked Sri Sri Thakur on the eve of laying the foundation stone of the *Ashram*. A saffron-flag was hoisted at the site as a symbol of asceticism (or the cult of 'Sanyas') to be perpetuated by the *Ashram*. Since there was early onset of monsoon, the work had to be deferred, but building materials, however, were purchased. It was initially decided to have the roof made of tiles. Bamboo poles were purchased and an amount of Rs. 200/- was advanced to Swami Brahmananda Saraswati of Adra *Ashram* for supply of tiles. Before he could deliver the tiles, the Swamijee expired during December, 1966. I again approached Sri Braja Gopal Mukharjee for solving my problems. He had an old deserted house. He advised me to get it dismantled and collect the wooden and other materials which could be used for the *Ashram*. The officials stationed at Gadabeta had also helped me in this venture. Assistance was received from the family members of Sri Rana and other devotees. Noteworthy of mention is that Sri Nityananda Rana,

besides arranging labourers, personally supervised the work. The structure of the *Ashram* was altered and instead of having tiled roof, concrete roofing was proposed. Two rooms with a verandah were constructed. A young lad named Satya, joined me to work as my attendant. He rendered selfless service in the construction work of the *Ashram* and must be praised for his sacrifice. On the '*Sraban Prunima*' day, during August, 1967, the *Ashram* cottage was formally inaugurated by conducting prayer, Pooja and *Havan* for Sri Sri Gurudev. The *Ashram* was named as "*Nigamananda Yogashram*." In the month of *Pousha* i.e. December, 1967, Satya was initiated by me into the Brahmacharya order.

Ever since I took *Sanyasa Deeskha* at Bhubaneswar, a local devotee named Sri Chakrapani Mishra, used to meet me at frequent intervals and we had long hours of discussion on spirituality, *Yoga Sadhana* and the importance of spiritual initiation. During the discussions he realised the need for entertaining a *Guru* in the (living) human form. In March, 1966, he and the members of his family took *Deeksha* from me. In December that year, I attended the Sarvabhauma Bhakta Sammilani (All India conference of the devotees) convened by the Neelachala Saraswat Sangha at Bhubaneswar. The next year, during my visit to Bhubaneswar, Sri Padmanabha Mishra, and later Sri Abhimanyu Mishra were also initiated.

After the establishment of the *Ashram*, some of the devoted and respectable persons who received initiation from me, include Sri Nabakishore Dash and Sri Bhabani Prasad De of Medinipur, Sri Tulashi Bhattacharya, Sri Mridul Shaha, Sri Bijoya Ghose of the localities around the *Ashram*. In the year, 1970, Sri Jiten Das, the Manager of People's Bank in Medinapur was also initiated. During 1972, inspired by my

veteran and pre-eminent disciple Sri Prasanna Badjena, one Sri Purnananda Jena of Narsinghpur of Orissa received initiation from me along with his family members at Daspalla. Later that year, Sri Jena's brother-in-law Sri Artatrana Rout and the members of his family were also initiated by me at Bhubaneswar. Gradually, the number of my disciples increased.

My popularity in Orissa, especially at Bhubaneswar and the liberal donations collected for the overall improvement of the *Ashram*, were chiefly due to the roles played by Sri Artatrana Rout and Sri Purnananda Jena, respectively. When I visited Bhubaneswar I stayed at Sri Rout's residence for quite long periods and I had the opportunity to meet and discuss with many devoted aspirants so as to arouse their interest for spiritual pursuits. After the initiation, Sri Rout endeavoured to free himself from the clutches of the mundane enticements by developing implicit faith and a spirit of surrender to the *Guru*. He also helped in the spreading of the message of spirituality within and outside the State of Orissa. By and by, due to their liberal donations in cash, kind and by way of service, four pucca rooms, a kitchen and a verandah were constructed in 1973-74 as extension of the original *Ashram* building.

During the last four to five years, the motivation for getting initiated by a *Guru* or spiritual Master in the human form, has been taking deeper roots not only at Bhubaneswar, but also at places like Dasapala, Khandapada, Sambalpur and Rajgangpur, etc. The teachings and ideals of this cult were fast propagated ever since Sri Prasanna Badjena and Sri Purnananda Jena had been initiated by me. Being influenced by such ardent disciples of mine many other devotees consulted me and were oriented and initiated. They were inspired to undertake spiritual and *Yogic* practices. Like minded devotees were drawn

to me as a consequence. I was invited by the devotees to teach and guide even in south Orissa and finally in the adjoining areas of Orissa in the State of Andhra Pradesh.

Having been deeply impressed by the devotion, of Sri Prasanna Badajena, one Sri Bhagirathi Sahu of Brahman Nuagam in the district of Ganjam was drawn towards me and was initiated. Thereafter, I gave *Deeksha* to Sri Sanatan, Sri Panchanan Sri Bhagabat, Sri Korachand and others of this locality. One Sri Mohan Rao and his wife residents of village Dankuru, came to Brahman Nuagam and took photographs of Sri Sri Thakur, my own and of one of my disciples Sri Nandarani Makharjee (later, initiated into *Sanyasa* and known as Anandamayi Saraswati) and started worshipping. Mohan Rao's wife had me appear thrice in her dream and her faith took deeper roots. Once I had been to Brahmana Nuagam at the invitation of my disciple Sri Bhagirathi Sahu. Having known this, Sri Mohan Rao and his friend Sri Jaga Rao of village Dankuru, came to Brahman Nuagam to invite me to their village. They took me on the bullock cart amidst *Keertan* and mass chanting, I was greeted and welcomed at the entrance of their village by a number of elderly men and women. The people of this village were Telugu speaking, but I myself did not know that language. My disciple Sri Bhagabat Padhi was our interpreter as he knew both Oriya and the Telugu languages. Sri Mohan Rao and Sri Jaga Rao's purpose in inviting me to their village was to receive *Deeksha* and practise *Yoga*. Although ignorant of their language, luckily, I didn't experience any difficulty. During this visit eight persons were initiated.

During the period of my stay in the villages of Andhra Pradesh I was accosted by some learned Pandits wanting to discuss with me Yogic philosophy. They were keen to know my attainments and my ideals. During prolonged conversation,

I explained to them the different levels of human consciousness such as the wakeful, the dream and the deep-sleep states and how a real *Yogi* having attained self realisation, dwells beyond these. My talk was translated into Telugu by Sri Bhagabat Padhi and the Telugu Pandits were satisfied with my replies. They pronounced that I was a competent *Yogi-Guru* and encouraged people to take *Deeksha* from me. By eating the extra hot food stuff in Andhra villages, I suffered from stomach trouble during that trip.

During my second visit to Dankuru, I was accompanied by my disciple Sri Anandamayi Saraswati, 'the mother'. There was great enthusiasm among the people to receive us. While we were taken in a procession amidst *Keertan* in the main village street, men and women had been waiting with water filled and coconut top pots (*Poorna Kumbha*) and lamps at the portals of the village decorated with mango leaf festoons to welcome us. The village folks were thronging with joy when they met us. We spent four to five days with them. Sri Simadri Gudia of Burjupadu and some other Telugu speaking men and women were initiated. Since mother Anandamayi Saraswati had the experience with hot south Indian dishes while she was a young girl and lived with her father (who was a railway employee) in the railway colony at Chakradharpur along with South Indian neighbours, she advised me to conclude eating with a drink of tamarind pepper soup. I followed her advice and didn't suffer from any stomach problem during my second trip to Andhra Pradesh,

Mother of the Blind Son

Although I have narrated at length all about myself and my *Ashram*, I have yet to relate how Srimati Nandarani Mukharjee respectfully addressed by me and by my disciples as 'the mother' joined me in my *Ashram*. My mother's eyes had been shut for ever from the light of this world only two months after my own eyes opened. Among the women who played the role of the mother to me during my long journey, one was my Mamima (i. e. the maternal aunt) who guided me along the path of 'Shakti' worship during my troubled days when I was a budding youth and the other joined me much later after I established the *Ashram*, as if, to act as a guide to me in running it. Both these persons, I should confess, brought fulfilment to my life. As I have already presented at length an account of the former, I wish now to dwell upon the background story relating to the latter without which this autobiography would not come to an end.

The devotees from the village Jaganathpur, in the district of Medinipur had been keeping close contacts with the Khadakusma *Ashram*. Srimati Nandarani Mukharjee, a married woman of a respectable family of the said village, was known to Chidananda Jee and Chandi Chaitanya Brahmachari who were the two senior most renunciates of the *Ashram*. By and by, I too came to know of her hospitality for the *Sadhus*, her interest in spiritual pursuits and the austerity with which she lived. She was almost regarded as second to none in nobility and devotedness in that area. One of our ashramites, Sri Keshabanandajee, perhaps, once asked me if I knew this enlightened

lady residing in that village. He believed that it would be wellnigh hard for any ordinary monk to discuss with her and win her admiration by meeting her subtle spiritual enquiries. He concluded asking "What good in talking to her and spoiling our own reputation ?" Although I did get tempted to meet and talk to such an unusual lady, I didn't make any deliberate attempt for a long period of time.

Once by chance, I myself and Kesabanandajee had to pay a visit to village Jaganathpur. We visited one of our devotees and while we were discussing, accidentally, Srimati Mukharjee was also around. Inter alia, the topic of higher levels of *Sadhana* (spiritual practice) was raised and she seemed to be deeply interested. She enquired, "If there are even higher stages of *Sadhana*, may I know, Sirs, how may one attain those ?" "With the blessings and segacious guidance of Sri Sri Gurudev alone the gates to the palace of higher realisation could be opened", I replied. This was my first brief interview with her. After taking food I and Sri Keshabanandajee left the village.

Srimati Nandarani Mukharjee was the disciple of Ma Durgapuri, the founder of Sharadeswari Ashram of Calcutta. Ma Durgapuri was the disciple of the famous Sri Sri Sharada Devi of the Ramakrishna Math. Srimati Mukharjee once met her *Gurumata* at Calcutta in order to solicit her advice and instructions to undertake meditation at higher levels I

She asked her *Gurumata*, "Would you kindly tell me the ways and means for attaining higher levels of spiritual consciousness. Will it be possible for me to reach those heights during this life ?"

"Why not ? Narayan would surely fulfil your ambitions", was the Guru-mothers compassionate reply.

Even from her childhood, Nandarani was taking great pleasure in meditation and prayer. However, her broken health was a serious handicap both for her spiritual as well as domestic activity. A mother of two children, a son and a daughter, unfortunately, she developed asthma which later on became a chronic affliction and that made her life miserable. Neither she could look to her children nor engage herself in meditation. The asthma made her suffer untold hardship and forced her to realise the futility of mudane life. The spiritual fervor already latent in her got intensified with time until it brought about a total transformation in her. Not only did she plan to renounce the household herself, she also got her daughter admitted into Saradeswari *Ashram* as a permanent renunciate. In course of time, the latter received *Sanyasa Deeksha* and was titled as Tapati Puri.

I used to meet the mother as a matter of course, and not with any specific purpose. Once she came with me to the Khadkusma *Ashram*. A detached look, deep insight and a calm demeanour naturally to be met in an aspirant were present in full measure in her. She appeared anxious to gain spiritual fulfilment in this very life.

Her only son was then reading B. Com. However, as our scriptures dictate, a person is to reap the fruits of past *Karma* (action) here in this "*Karma Bhumi*" (world of action). Symptoms of mental derangement suddenly appeared in her only son. At that time, I was staying at Gadabeta and the *Ashram* building work was getting completed. One fine morning, I noticed her son standing on the *Ashram* Verandah. Overtaken by surprise I asked him, "Well, how are you here?"

"Mother has sent me over asking me to stay here for sometime for a change", he said. His health hadn't yet been so bad as to cause anxiety, but his talks, the eye movements, however, appeared abnormal.

I asked him to stay at the *Ashram*. His name is Dhanu alias Pranab Mukharjee. After sometime, the mother wanted to personally witness the condition of her son and wrote to me for my permission to visit the *Ashram*. After sometime she arrived. Her worries got intensified at the worsening condition of Dhanu. Her husband, Sri Mukharjee, started to send money every month for their maintenance. I tried my level best to arrange for proper treatment and medical care for Pranab who soon was confirmed to be a schizophrenic.

On the other hand, quite unaware, I developed cataract in my eyes – an old age malady, but the consequent sufferings were partly also because of the results of my past *karma* (action). As days passed, my eye sight became dimmer and dimmer till I nearly became blind. This was really a sad state of affair for a *Sanyasi* who had just started with lofty ambitions of spreading spiritual consciousness in the society. In the past, I did suffer severe ill-health, but as I was much younger then, I needed no assistance from anybody, I fully relied on myself and on God. The strength of my mind and complete surrender to God served as a tonic.

Later, while I was staying at the Adra *Ashram*, I felt that I was almost on the point of death. As I was not suffering from any physical ailment, I did not then have to wait for somebody to help me. Also, as a dependent Ashramite, I was not required to collect any food stuff myself. But the third attack came at a time when I had just begun to be independent and had little outside help. There was none at Gadabeta

intimately known to me except the Rana's family. I had negligible acquaintance in the nearby localities. Satya Brahmachari was a novice and of tender age. Unless I went out and collected alms and other articles, what do the two of us eat ? I felt greatly disturbed from morning till dusk worrying myself as to how to collect food stuff, for I could not move out due to blindness. I had lost my mother as an infant, however, due to her blessings, did I not spend my entire life just as an infant ? If it were not to be so, at different stages of my life, how could I have got the foster-care of a mother. As an infant, the village ladies fed me from their breast, when I was laid in my uncle's shop. My aunt became my guide and philosopher, and even her little daughter 'Bhandi' acted as my "*Uttar Sadhika*" (senior aspirant). Again why should Srimati Mukharjee come to the *Ashram* precisely at this critical point of time under the plea of sharing the fruits of the past *Karma* of her son ? Did she know that I was to become blind ?

She perhaps came following some divine plan and not just by coincidence. I had little doubt then, and have no doubt now owing to the grace of the supreme universal Mother who protects her helpless children at all times and all places in the world. She, thus, took charge of not one but two of her sons : one of them a madcap and the other a blind hog : one was 21 and the other 61 years old. She arranged for the treatment of my eyes, used many types of medicine, herbal, homoeopathic, biochemic and all that, but they were of no avail. She attended on me day and night. Nothing could cure me of my blindness. Those who knew suggested surgical operation as the only remedy. However, the mother didn't give up her hopes to get me cured by less traumatic methods. Satya Brahmachari was attending to sundry indoor and outdoor jobs.

Despite my blindness, I was frequenting the nearby places, viz., Phatesingpur, Radhanagar and Amalagoda. Although

the road, the people and the vehicles were not visible to me, due to past habit and by sensing sound, I used to push ahead with a walking stick in hand in order to locate the depressions and the elevations. I wasn't habituated to hold the stick and hence I was feeling most uneasy to walk with it.

Once, while walking near about the *Ashram*, my leg slipped on the canal bank made up of red gravels and I fell down and received bruises which started burning. That served as the cause for my exasperation. To add insult to injury, I intentionally fell myself down and rolled at that spot twice or thrice. Mentally, I complained to my *Gurudev*, "Was I the only one to be meted out such punishment? How long do I suffer like this?" On another occasion, while going to the bazar without the stick, I dashed against another person. From that day onwards, wherever I moved, I never forgot to carry the stick with me.

Although Chakrapani was initiated in the year 1966, he wasn't keeping contact, with me. However, my blindness appeared to give him an opportunity to serve me. I got a letter written through mother to him. In the month of *Kartik* (September-October 1967) he came to the *Ashram* and realising the need of the hour, he took me to Cuttack. After getting myself examined by Dr. Rajguru, the eye specialist, I got one of my eyes operated upon. I used glasses and could view the outer world once again. The following year, the cataract of the other eye was also removed. During my stay at the S. C. B. Medical College Hospital, Cuttack, Dr. Rajguru the Surgeon, Dr. Nilakantha Mishra, the younger brother of Chakrapani, my disciples, Srimati Swarna (the receptionist), Sri Uchhab Sahu, Sri Hadu Sahu, Sri Prasanna Badajena and a host of others had rendered untainted service with love and devotion. I pray to Sri Sri Gurudev to shower on them the choicest blessings.

By the blessings of the mother, I was cured but her other child, Pranab, couldn't recover from Schizophrenia. His condition deteriorated. His father arrived at the *Ashram* and we took him to Cuttack and consulted with Dr. Partha Rao, the Specialist. As it was inconvenient to get him treated at Cuttack, he was shifted to Ranchi for treatment. Mother stayed at her brother's residence at Chakradharpur. After sometime Pranab returned from Ranchi, but was not fully cured. Mother and her son were back again at the *Ashram*. Due to certain peculiar circumstances, I had to keep mother separated from her son for some time. I sent her to Bhubaneswar where she stayed for a little over three months in Sri Abhimanyu Mishra, my disciple's residence. The service rendered by him and his family in looking after the comforts of the mother was exemplary. They deserve Sri Guru's blessings.

On her return from Bhubaneswar, Srimati Mukharjee proposed to get herself initiated into *Sanyasa*. The series of difficulties, strife and struggle which she had to put up with as a housewife during the earlier years had made her realise the futility of material pursuits in this world. Therefore, she was mentally preparing herself to cut off for good the ties of attachment at the earliest opportunity. It had come then, and she was determined to take *Sanyasa* and become a formal "renunciate". During the Durga Pooja period in 1971, I initiated her into the *Sanyasa* order and renamed her as "Anandamayee Saraswati". She then became fully independent and was practically freed of the worldly bondage. The money being

sent by her husband for her livelihood was no more accepted. Their bond of attachment was then terminated for this life.

Having been established in *Sanyasa*, she acquired a novel outlook—a new dimension in life and radiated a glow around her. At the initial stage, she was my devotee, later she became a servant worker, then she played the role of my mother and finally she turned as a disciple—a *Sanyasin*. She is calm, serene and sincere and would have continued to earn my gratitude had she not become a *Sanyasin* and an “equal” of mine. After taking *Sanyasa* our senior-junior and *Guru*-disciple relationship got automatically severed. In fact both of us acquired the nature of Sri Narayan i. e., *Brahman*—the absolute. Even so I cannot think for a moment the existence of this little *Ashram* without the presence of the mother. Every article of the *Ashram* and in fact the entire atmosphere in the *Ashram* is replete with her fondness and affectionate motherly love. She is bothered little about the income, expenditure; the profit or loss of the *Ashram*. Nonetheless, the three permanent members including myself and the many workers and the guests and other disciples who frequently visit us are able to get the food cooked for them due to her care and supervision. Mother is a *sanyasin*, and in her gross form, she is kindness incarnate, an Annapurna incognito ! She had almost cut off relationship with her mad son who wanders about, but instead she had the honour of being proclaimed as the proud mother of hundreds of my disciples. She is receiving full allegiance, devotion and salutations from all. On the



Sri Sri Anandamayee Saraswati, 'the Mother'

other hand, I have been receiving the mercy of the mother at different stages throughout my life in copious measure. At the fourth quarter of my life, looking back into the dark nights when I felt to be an orphan in the wide world (dumb, inarticulate and helpless like a worm by the way side), meditating in the cave, facing humiliation in the hands of my compatriots in the original *Ashram*, I feel dismayed and at the same time enthralled to have been able to continue to live to see the light of the day due to the blessings of the divine Mother alone. I might have forgotten 'Her', but she didn't even for a moment. I shall really deem it worth my labour, if anyone under similar circumstances could find a ray of inspiration from this narrative.



End of the Quest

I was one of those fortunate few who had the proud privilege of receiving and greeting the great Master, Sadguru Sri Sri Nigamananda Paramahansa Dev during his last visit to Khadakusma *Ashram* not long before he left his mortal coils. I was the one who received *Deeksha* from him in a state of suspense, anxiety, fear and confusion. This was the necessary outcome of the fruits of my past virtuous '*Karma*', which had thus to be enjoyed without having to add any more during this life due to His blessings.

My unflinching and unshaken devotion towards my *Gurudev* won for me the mercy of the ever propitious almighty God and through my good luck perhaps, I began to realise by and by the unfulfilled aspiration of my past births. The powers of visualising the past and the future began to be accomplished. During *Samadhi* an individual soul is unified with the *Brahman*, the Absolute. This supreme state transcends all limits of ordinary consciousness and stems from losing the small 'I' or ego and that, in turn, results in the liberation or release of the soul from rebirth. This is indeed eternal emancipation, the final beatitude or "*Mahanirvan*".

I began to realise that in my past births, I had already attained realisation in *Yoga*, *Jnana* (spiritual knowledge by introspective analysis) and *Tantra* (God realisation through the agency of the senses). Therefore, within nearly three years in this life, I attained all of them in quick succession. However in the past, I had not been able to achieve "*Bhava Samadhi*"

(a perpetual super conscious state without physical control of senses and remaining within the familiar world) as defined, attained and preached by my *Gurudev*, Sri Sri Thakur Nigamananda Paramahansa. Through His grace, I could now acquire it and that in reality was the consummation of my *Sadhana*. I have been guiding my disciples to help them without distracting them from their normal activities to partake of the ecstatic experience of "*Bhava Samadhi*" such that they would get established in divine consciousness which is their real nature. I have been waiting to witness their success and that is my last wish in life.

I had undergone, a series of rites of purification at different stages from different Masters beginning with my *Kulaguru* (The traditional family Guru) who imparted the *Gayatri* Mantra *Deeksha* at the sacred thread ceremony when my mind was only beginning to be impressionable. This action was the sowing of the seed in my tender heart, which meant greater blessings than any other on earth. This perhaps leads to the blooming of a lotus in the pond, and that at a future point of time adored the sacred feet of my *Guru*, Sri Sri Thakur, Nigamananda Paramahansa Dev. My uncle's consolation 'Bhola will be a man among men', had infused courage, inspiration and a sense of determination in me to seek and pursue the path for spiritual development. At the earlier stages, I was having mixed notions and clouded thoughts as to the ways of the *Sadhus* and ascetics. They appeared to me to be quite mysterious. This urged me to live in the company of *Sadhus*, which in its turn enabled me to avail of the magnetic touch of Godly souls—viz, Swami Chidananda, Swami Nigamananda Paramahansa Dev, my maternal aunt, Nanda Kshepa and lastly Swami Prajnanandajee. The pooled blessings of these super souls resulted in the fulfilment of my life's mission. In a state of delusion I entered inside the *Ashram*, the rest house in the life's uphill journey to fight against sensebound

hunger and by and by I learned the art of fixing the mind on the Supreme spirit through *Yogic* practices and introspection. Otherwise at the final stage, Arjun's confession (after getting transformed listening to the profound message of the Geeta of Lord Sri Krishna)

"Nasto Mohah smrtir labdha tvatprasadat mayachyuta
Sthitosmi gatasamdehah karishye vachnam tava".

("My delusion is destroyed. I have regained my memory through your grace, O Achyuta, now I am firm : I am free from doubt. I shall act according to your word".) would not have appeared to be, in letter and spirit, my own candid conviction and realisation when the quest for myself came to its end.

During these years many devotees and aspirants, both men and women, from the States of Orissa, West Bengal, and Andhra Pradesh have been initiated by me. I have taught them spiritual code of conduct and the *Yogic* exercise to repeat and meditate the "*Mantra*" in the "*Ajapa*" mode. They now meet, in weekly community prayer sessions (Sangha), and conduct *Guru Pooja Keertan* (chanting) and read passages from the spiritual texts with great interest. Besides, from 1975 onwards, disciples and devotees celebrate my birth anniversary at different places by conducting mass prayers, worshipping, chanting; organising discourses by enlightened spiritual speakers.

As days rolled by, I felt that some of my deserving disciples have to be initiated into *Sanyasa*. The mother's turn came first. This initiation was an act of preparing the disciples to cling to the path of renunciation steadfastly and by dwelling on the Vadantic truths, endeavour to get established in *Brahman*, the supreme. Two years after the initiation of the mother into *Sanyasa*, I imparted *Sanyasa Deeksha* according to the vedic rites to my

favourite (once my young assistant) Sri Guru Das Brahmachari, who had joined as a sanskrit student at the Khadakusma *Ashram*. (Sri Guru Das's spirit of service, simplicity and steadfast devotion have been beyond reproach). This event took place at Dasahara week of 1973. Guru Das performed all the rites as I did years ago when I was consecrated by Swami Prajnandajee. Guru Das's name, after the *sanyasa* initiation, was changed to 'Birajananda Saraswati'. After visiting various shrines of India as a *Paribrajaka* (Traveller), he is now the Head of the Chota Baduya *Ashram*, established by Swami Chidanandajee near Medinipur.

In the year 1974, on the Akshaya Tritiya day, Srimat Kumuda Brahmachari also received *Sanyasa Deeksha* from me and became known as Swami Dayananda.

Brahmachari Sambuddha Chaitanya who had been initiated into Brahmacharya by Swami Prajnandanda Saraswati has been with me in the *Ashram* since 1975. Through his devotion and untiring service he has been able to gain the blessings of Sri Sri Gurudev.

In the year 1976, Sri Govinda Brahmachari of Chota Baduya *Ashram* was also initiated by me into *Sanyasa* and was titled as Gambhirananda Saraswati.

These last few years have provided me with some leisure for planning and execution. Looking back, one normally remembers only the good moments and the bad ones are put aside, But it is just the reverse for me judging from what I have learnt from experience. One has to put up with and do the thing at the right time and at the right moment Time and tide waits for none. The mission had to be fulfilled. I wanted to extend the existing *Ashram* to accommodate the increasing number of

my disciples, and devotees so as to provide them with necessary amenities to stay during the annual celebrations held in the *Ashram*.

On the Foundation day, i. e. on Akshaya Tritiya of the year 1979, it was decided to begin the construction of the first floor of the *Ashram*. There was no money or materials on hand. A rough plan of the building was contemplated and it was estimated to cost around Rs. 40,000/-. Due to endless blessings of Sri Sri Thakur, sized timber, and planks were purchased from Koraput in Orissa in exchange of money received as donation. Rana's family members who were benevolent all-through, donated the required cement. Due to spontaneous and generous help of my disciples and devotees the first floor did come up much ahead of my expectations. I may add that my disciple Sri Purnananda Jena rendered immense help in arranging for a full team of Masons and helpers from Narasinghapur for this work. They did the work selflessly and to my utmost satisfaction deserved the blessings of Sri Sri Thakur.

In May 1979, I presided over the annual function of Sriguru Sangha at Bhubaneswar. It has been established by my co-disciple brother Srimat Durga Prasanna Paramahansa Dev, another illustrious disciple of Swami Nigamananda Paramahansa Dev. He was a *Yogi* of a very high order and a well known Master of eastern India with an enormous following. I was very much pleased to attend the function. During this visit, I came to know Sri L. S. Panda of Bhubaneswar, a disciple of Swami Durga Prasanna Paramahansa more intimately.

To commemorate the Foundation day of my *Ashram* on Akshaya Tritiya every year, a ceremony is held and the ideals of Saraswat Ashram and Math are remembered and resuscitated.



A view of the Ashram building

Another function is arranged on the occasion of *Sraban Poornima* in order to celebrate the birth anniversary of Sri Sri Thakur, my revered *Gurujee*. Many devotees and disciples attend both the functions and meticulously participate in *Usha Keertan*, *Arati*, prayers, reading of spiritual texts, etc., being performed all over the day. A few cows are maintained at the *Ashram*. There is an adjoining piece of land where rice, wheat and vegetables are grown.

I have been trying my best, at least for the last fifteen years through my devotees and disciples to propagate the ideals of Sanatan (Eternal and Impersonal) *Dharma* as preached by the succession of *Gurus*. No one knows when the preaching of this *Dharma* began, and it is said that this is going to last for ever. If anybody is keen enough to know and learn the process of undertaking *yogic* meditation, I shall deem it a pleasure, after considering his aptitude, to train him up in the methods of '*Laya Yoga*' as has been prescribed by my Master. It is for this reason, and also to lead the household devotees, from their daily strife and struggle to a peaceful and blissful state, I have been waiting. In these days of tension and turmoil, everybody making constant efforts to gain and consolidate material or sensual pleasure, however, the end result often is dissatisfaction, disappointment, sorrow or pain. Peace and tranquility seem to be remote. One keeps forgetting that every hour is precious and whatever goes never returns. It is necessary now, to identify the cause of unhappiness and uproot it as I have been doing all my life.

I welcome my readers to meet me and bring their spiritual problems to me for solution.

We live in the *Kali* Age - an age of distress and disharmony. We race after fleeting pleasures all the time. The only hope is in taking refuge in a '*Sadguru*' who can guide and direct the seeker towards lasting peace and bliss. The quest of life may thus come to its end.

HARI OM TAT SAT.



ERRATA

Page	Para	Line	Incorrect	Correct
6	1	4	on	or
6	6	1	urcie	uncle
9	1	1	uncie	uncle
13	3	8	hause	house
14	5	9	was	is
24	3	3	pronounced	pronounce
27	1	6	was	is
27	3	1	Any	any
30	1	1	deligently	diligently
30	4	7	Mindidg	Minding
35	3	2		
39	2	16	heared	heaved
40	1	1	Brahma).	Brahman)" "
42	2	7	a a	a
51	3	9	awakened	awake
53	5	3	Repremandind	Repremanding
57	2	1	am	was
57	2	1	What	With
57	2	2	if myself	if I myself
59	2	8	and genfly	and a gently
59	3	7	somebre	sombre
60	1	19	prover	proven
65	1	8	was vain	was in vain
71	2	4	roof	root
71	2	9	como	come
76	1	1	stupourous	stuporous
76	1	4	shirt circuited	short-circuited
76	4	7	stomack	stomach
78	2	3	on	and
95	2	8	ambrostia	ambrosia
99	1	1	had heard	heard

Page	Para	Line	Incorrect	Correct
99	2	1	had said	said
115	3	9	annui	ennui
119	5	1	will	would
122	2	11	came here	had come there
127	3	1-2	met zamindar	met the zamindar
129	2	5	human	humans
136	3	4	connected	connoted
137	1	3	addressing as	addressing J as
161	1	3	penial	pineal
178	2	14	and published	published
179	1	1	'Jnani Guru'	'Jnani Guru' after visiting vasudhara falls !
187	2	7	wife delighted	wife were delighted
190	1	14	It	If it
198	1	4	'Pra jnanam Brahma'	Prajnam Braham to be heard and contemplated upon by the different Dasa- nama orders during and after initiation into Sanyasa.
201	1	7	may	might
202	1	11	'Niravan Sataka'	'Nirvan Satka'
221	1	8	pertake	partake
221	1	9	ecstactic	ecstatic
222	5	2	intitiated	Initiated
222	5	3	prepairing	preparing

About the Author and his book

Swami Vishuddhananda Saraswati, the author of this work is an enigma — he is the Author and not necessarily the Writer of this autobiography, because he could not even complete the formal primary education in life. However, his claim is justified because he kept the initial record of the chain of events concerning major part of his life in his diary note-book. Later, he described those at length to inquisitive audiences in a number of places and had his voice recorded on the tape. The original Oriya version of his autobiography styled as 'Bholar Atmasmruti', that compiled such accounts, has already run through its second edition during the seventies. The book has been translated into Bengali by Sudeepa Bhattacharya and published by Nigamananda Ashram nearly five years ago. The present English version is by and large a translation of the Oriya book by Sri Lokanatha Saran Panda who describes Swamijee's life as a glorious demonstration of the Guru's grace in action.. This autobiography of Swamijee is a long quest in self-discovery both in a pragmatic and abstract philosophic sense. As a youth, he had the opportunity of getting chosen for initiation by his Guru, Swami Nigamananda Saraswati, the great Spiritual Master who energized and converted him from Bholanath to Bhola Chaitanya Brahmachari. Brahmacharijee then continued to progress in the path of Yoga sadbana remaining in a cave for several years and attained 'Laya' and 'Bhava' Samadhi. As a pilgrim, he walked for days alongside the meandering 'Mandakini' in the Himalayas during his trip to Badrinath and Vasudhara falls. After taking Sanyas two decades ago from Swami Prajnananda Saraswati, he is presently the Spiritual Master (Sadguru) presiding at the Nigamananda Ashrarna near 'Garbeta (P.O. Amahgoda) in Mediuipur District of West Bengal. He is being followed and adored by people of all walks of life aspiring to attain poise and peace through the practice of 'Laya Yoga'.